Would You Keep Me Craving?

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Would You Keep Me Craving?

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Summary

There might be a new serial killer haunting Maryland, every bit as ruthless, brilliant, and terrifyingly creative as The Chesapeake Ripper, or worse, maybe the Ripper is becoming something new.

The FBI needs to know which one it is

When Quantico Professor Will Graham refuses to waste his time on a crime scene that he's sure is nothing like a Ripper murder, the FBI has to look somewhere else. In desperation, Special Agent Jack Crawford brings in an associate of Dr Bloom's who has occasionally done consultant work for them before.

Desperate times call for desperate measures and Dr Hannibal Lecter is just the man for the job.

What does Hannibal see when he looks into the depths of this horrifying murder?

Potential

... and that means he has a dinner to plan

Notes

Please mind the rating

if you're concerned. It's probably not going to be a lot more graphically violent then the show... but it will be absolutely just as homoerotically graphically violent as the show.

See the end of the work for more notes

In A Divine Image

The Tooth Fairy impassively watched his prey snivelling on the cabin floor. It was always kinda funny that the meanest men were always the quickest to break down crying. The second they realized what was happening to them, that they were going to die. First they panicked, cussed, screamed and threatened, then they cried. Unfortunately, the meat was useless to him until it had cried itself out. So he always had to sit and listen to all the loud moaning, all the swearing that they didn't know better, that they had regrets, that they had to do it, or his favorite lie, that they did it out of love. It was always the same, like they read from the same exact script, took a class in abuser excuses 101.

Waiting them out was an annoying necessity.

This one was nearly done with the whining, he whistled loud and piercing to get the man's attention again.

"I asked you a question Mr Williams? Why do you suppose parents make their children the earthen jars they hide their sins from god within?"

The man sobbed, desperately jagged as he tried to slither away jerkily, trailing blood.

"I-, I-, I don't know!"

"You don't know? It seems like the sort of thing you should know about yourself, don't you think Mr Williams?"

"Please I didn't do anything to him. I'm his father. He has to learn-"

"Historically, numerous cultures around the world have had myths and legends around the existence of strange otherworldly children. Of course, this is an era of science. We know better now don't we?"

Mr Williams gurgled in fear, scrabbling uselessly at the at raw wooden floor boards under him.

"I didn't do anything. He has to learn to be normal. I did it for him!"

The Tooth fairy, wrathful at that, grabbed Mr William's ankle, pulling him backwards and flipping him onto his back, planted a knee heavily in his stomach, pinning him again.

"Well that was the wrong answer. I'm afraid you're not very interesting Mr Williams, actually you're incredibly boring, and not doing a very good job of staying alive"

Mr Williams frantically pawed at the knee in his stomach with shaky, grievously bleeding, thumbless hands.

"Please, I won't tell anyone what you look like. I won't, people will find me soon. It's a worm moon, the spring thaw is coming, my cabin, the mountain, the lake, we use it for hunting, fishing in the spring and summer. You can't kill me here. They'll find me."

"Oh you misunderstand me Mr Williams, I'm counting on them finding you soon."

Contemplating the pleading man bleeding under him, The Tooth Fairy scowled.

"You really have nothing to offer, not to me, not your son, certainly not your ex wife. The world's gonna be better off without you. Dying is the kindest gift you could give them. I want you to really know that in your bones before I'm done with you."

"Please, I don't understand what you want from me?! You bit off my thumbs. Why-"

Radiating fury edged with a smirking ferocity, The Tooth Fairy leaned into the man's space, close enough that Williams would feel his breath hot on his face.

"Isn't it obvious Mr Williams? I want you to die horrifically, but first I want you to shut the fuck up. If you're confused, I could shove those thumbs of yours down your throat, then you'd be quiet."

Mr Williams, frantic with terror, lurched into a wretched flailing moaning "Noooooooooo"

Viper quick, the killer slid forward ruthlessly kneeing the man in the sternum. He smiled in blood thirsty amusement as the sustained pressure made his prey's ribs crack with a crunchy whump of air. Satisfied, The Tooth Fairy jammed his strong fingers deep into the hollow of the prey's cheeks to force his mouth open wide. Now, tongue hanging out of his mouth, moaning weakly, he was more half dead cow then man. Just meat like any other animal. How apropos.

Eyes wild with terror soaked pain, the prey didn't understand what was happening to him until the monster was on him. He wasn't strong enough to fight as the man leaned in close, a horrific replication of the intimacy of lovers locked in a romantic embrace, and with a wet laugh, bit his protruding tongue completely off.

Mr Williams eyes rolled back in his head, all but unresponsive, screaming and screaming. The Toothy fairy, furious at his game being interrupted with so much noise, had half a mind to torture the man longer then planned, just for being annoying. Ultimately common sense prevailed. It was getting to be time to go. He hauled the squealing bleeding man upright, though he knew he was probably beyond understanding human language. Tooth Fairy still had something to say, saying it gave him comfort. That was enough.

He dragged the half conscious man out to the lake, sloshing through the early march water, chilled to near freezing with first thaw run off and the bitter cold of early spring nights in the mountains. There, clammy mud between his toes, ice cold water lapping at his knees, the fairy held Mr Williams up carelessly, so they could both see the moon clearly.

"You tried to invoke the moon earlier to save yourself. Did you know the moon is the mother of monsters when you tried to scare me with her name? Or do you, like me, understand in

your bones where both your allegiance and your devotional gifts should belong? No answer? Oh well, it's about time for me to go anyway."

With that he spun Mr Williams around, held him high above his head by only the dying man's ears and hair, a macabre rag doll offered to the moon in tribute. Exultant, the killer let the man sag, brought his mouth to his prey's tender throat and ripped the artery there out with his monstrous pointed teeth. He slurped the chunk of wet rubbery flesh down, swallowing with a satisfied sigh, held the man clutched tight to his chest as arterial blood gushed over his bare skin, swirling across his chest, puddling in the hollow of his collar bone, streaming over his arms and down his sides into the lake.

The blood was beautiful under the light of a full moon. Purple black, it reminded him of the deep indigo of the sky right before dawn. He allowed himself a moment to lay back in the water, let the frigid embrace of the lake wash everything away. Feeling refreshed, born again of the full moon ripened waters, he dragged the corpse back to shore and got to work carefully ripping Mr Williams' heart & canine teeth out, setting the body up how he wanted it found. In supplication for a forgiveness that could never come. He needed to focus and get to it, there was a lot he still had to do before dawn.

Later after he'd cleaned up his mess, making sure the only evidence to find was the evidence he wanted them to find, located the backpack he'd hidden in the woods, gotten dressed in clean unremarkable hiking clothes, and was ready to head back down the mountain he remembered one of the most important parts of his display.

"Oh I almost forgot, that would be embarrassing."

The tooth fairy pulled clean surgical gloves out of his backpack, dug a large coin out of one of his pockets, and set it carefully on the stump of the man's tongue, framed beautifully by the gap where his canines used to be. He fussed a little making sure everything was exactly as it should be.

Finally satisfied, the tooth fairy melted into the predawn grey, content and settled in his skin. He still had plenty time to get home, get changed and get to work.

It was gonna be a good day

♥

Will watched his students with a sort of detached fond annoyance. They were completely ignoring him, huddled over their phones gossiping with each other. He cleared his throat, loudly.

"So is anyone listening to this lecture about things that will definitely be on the final... or should I just give up, go home, and take my dogs fishing?"

There was a reluctant rustle in the room, one of the kids in the front row, cringed up at him embarrassed.

"Sorry Professor, it's Freddie Lounds... You know from the Tattler? She just posted an article, a new body was found this morning at some hunting lodge in the mountains"

One of the other boys slapped his desk declaratively, stage whispering much to loudly

"Bro...sorry Prof, but bro was missing teeth when they found him, freaky right?"

Will sighed, rubbing his eyes. He was supposed to be teaching a lecture right now, not dealing with this.

"Teeth were missing? Do they think it was The Tooth Fairy?"

The kids exploded in questions, when the hubub died down, the first kid who'd spoken up, took a deep emboldening breath.

"Uh no professor, well uh, I'm not sure about the Tooth Fairy, I don't think I've heard of-, no the uh, Freddie said they suspect it's the Chesapeake Ripper because of factors she's umm not at liberty to discuss"

Will laughed, dry and annoyed, looking over the kids heads at the back wall, somewhere neutral.

"So the FBI thinks The Chesapeake Ripper just took up dentistry recently for funsies?"

The boy acting as class ambassador looked unsure.

"Uhh....yes?"

"Right of course, someone as obsessive, and diligent as the Chesapeake Ripper took up dentistry, just because. You know I chose to teach because I wanted to expand young people's minds... That and I wanted a more regular schedule then I thought the FBI could give me. But some days children, I regret my choices. Today is one of those days... and since I lack the will to go on, guess what? It's pop quizzzzzzzz time"

The room booed a handful of half hearted nooooos. They all knew his pop quizzes were almost always thought exercises and he gave credit for any well thought out answers. Professor Graham's pop quizzes weren't to bad.

"First question, I want you to break down and explain the three most common mind sets of killers that believe their victims deserve their deaths. The second question, analyze the M.O. and most recent crime scene of any of the cases we've gone over this semester. Be thorough kids. Last but not least. For up to ten bonus points, Is the Chesapeake Ripper a Dentist, yes or no. Explain your reasoning, extensively. You won't get points if you don't put in the effort."

There was a small wave of excitement at that last part, they always enjoyed flexing their freshly planted profiling skills. Will was way to tired to wait it out today though.

"Ok kids, it's been fun... Kinda. You have till the end of class, turn your papers into Abby. I'm heading out. And please kids for the love of everything you hold holy, I have just as much access to the Tattler website as you do. I don't need you all to email me a million times

everytime she posts any developments. Ok? I'll give an extra five bonus points for anyone who doesn't drunk email me tonight to ask me why The Chesapeake Ripper would be taking teeth now. Have fun, good, luck, and I'll see you Friday."

♥

He was waiting for the elevator minding his own business when Jack materialized beside him, inclining his head in quiet acknowledgement. Will scowled aggressively at the call buttons on the elevator for having not brought him an elevator yet. **Traitors**

"Has anyone ever told you that when you want to, you're surprisingly quiet for a cop, Jack?"

"Well, yeah actually they have Will. It's a skill that has on occasion been useful to me"

"Like sneaking up on unwitting criminology professors?"

Jack raised an eyebrow at him.

"Like convincing my best consultant to help us with a new case that could use his discerning professional eye, Professor. If The Chesapeake Ripper is changing his M.O. We need to know."

Will huffed, rolling his eyes, jabbing the elevator call button again for good measure.

"The Chesapeake Ripper? Of all the asinine-. Jesus Christ Jack. Hell No, call Dr Bloom"

Sighing like Will was a recalcitrant child, Jack tried again

"Mr Graham I understand your frustration. Must I remind you that there are lives on the line. Dr Bloom is very good but she can't do what you do. We need your mind on this Will"

Will huffed an unamused laugh, turning to face Jack fully, a thing he hated doing.

I don't want to see your secrets Jack

"That's Doctor Graham. You guys always forget the Doctor part, even when you're begging me for help. I wonder why that is? Do you think it's the diagnosis? Because I think it's the diagnosis. If I wanted to be an FBI minion, I would've applied for the FBI. I didn't. I'm exactly where I want to be Jack. I'll teach your little underlings to think for themselves, but if you want my services as a consultant you'll have to pay me. This isn't a freebies for cops kind of club. And No Alana can't do what I do but she's perfectly serviceable as a profiler. Alana Bloom can just as easily tell you that The Chesapeake Ripper isn't suddenly taking up hobby dentistry. See ya later Jack"

The elevator at this moment blessedly slid open, Will stepped in decisively, turned sharp on the balls of his feet, and shot Jack annoyed finger guns as the doors slid closed between them.

♥

Jack Crawford, put upon civil servant, a man just trying to do his very important job, gave himself 45 seconds to be incredibly frustrated with *Doctor* Graham.

The most annoying part of Will's refusal was that he'd said that they didn't need him because it wasn't The Ripper twice, and if Will Graham believed that strongly enough to say it twice, he was probably right. He was that good, sometimes it galled Jack. Giving in he finally pulled out his phone to call Alana. She answered on the the third ring.

"Jack? Is this about the body they found up at the lake?"

"Yeah, unfortunately it is."

"You think it might be The Ripper?"

Jack grumbled to himself.

"Well, we thought it might be....but, uh Dr Graham doesn't think so. He's busy though so. He referred us to you."

Alana sighed audibly over the line.

"Yeah, I bet he did, you're to generous with him Jack. Ok so what didn't Freddie Lounds say, that has you guys this insistent on having a profiler up?"

"... You got me Dr Bloom. He had a strange coin in his mouth, disemboweled, holding his own still attached intestines, . *Several* parts of him were missing. It looked like he was praying or crying... The effect is viscerally disturbing"

Alana considered it for a minute.

"That sounds a little grimly esoteric for most our murderers. You should call, Dr. Hannibal Lecter. He's really good, maybe as good as Will, he doesn't like to consult much. It's all a little macabre for him, but he has a couple times when there's been a need... and religions interest him. I'll give him a call. Soften him up for you."

"Great thanks Alana, let me know and I'll give him a call"

Jack hung up and closed his eyes for a minute. These academic primadonnas were gonna be the death of him. Maybe he would retire early and take Bella back to Italy for awhile.

Maybe, after this case.

♥

Hannibal hoped he'd not made a mistake, agreeing to speak to Alana's FBI agent associate. When she called, she told him that the case was more "his thing" then hers, which was an interesting thing for her to think. He couldn't quite imagine what she presumed his thing was.

In the end he considered it more out of curiosity as to what exactly Alana understood his thing to be rather than a desire to help.

Typically he didn't consult with the FBI, it was playing with fire in a way he wasn't interested in anymore. Living in Baltimore, being so close to them struck a careful balance. On the one hand he could casually keep an eye on them. Knowing what the FBI was up to at any given time was an integral part of his numerous contingency plans. It could give him a vital extra few minutes if he ever needed to run, extra minutes that might be the difference between being caught and escaping.

On the other hand living in the FBI's back yard was a bit like living in a house with one of those old Midwest standard black velvet paintings of Jesus, who's painted eyes always seem to follow the viewer around the room.

Hannibal had a client once who'd gotten his first blow job one sultry summer night on his grandmother's couch under the watchful eyes of one such painting. He'd since then consistently had difficulty with physical intimacy. Every time he drew close to completion, he saw Jesus and his soulful despairing eyes looking down on him, judging him for his carnal sins.

Likewise, living right under the FBI's watchful gaze was consistently a mood killer. Which might've been a problem if he'd been able to find any joy in the hunt or the ephemeral beauty of his creations recently. Unfortunately such joy was fleeting of late. Technically he knew he was depressed, however the depression was secondary to the fact that he found life and the people in it, fundamentally uninteresting and painfully predictable. Even his long standing mistress lady death, was stagnant and repetitive. Tiresome.

In the end he agreed to talk to Agent Crawford because he was curious about the nature of Alana's referral, and he ultimately he couldn't bring himself to care anymore. He'd either be caught or he wouldn't. Maybe the case would give him one single second of anything interesting to consider... and if he got caught... at least that would be new.

The subtle chime rang that let him know someone was at his office door. All his concerns and considerations were tucked away behind a a polite mask of professionalism as he went to let Agent Crawford in.

"Agent Crawford"

"Dr Lecter, So nice to meet you"

"Please come in Agent. We've actually met briefly. It wasn't under the best of circumstances. A man hunt in Montana. I was called in as a second opinion profiler, because of the lack of progress"

Jack Whistled low and appreciative.

"Oh the Montana Marksman case. The sniper, right? We caught him because of your insight that he was likely a hunter, with an accomplice he was intimately close to. I'm so sorry I forgot."

"Not at all, despite the suits I can be rather adept at being forgettable. It was an interesting case. He'd given you the slip for quite some time, not as long as The Ripper, but a genuine challenge none the less. The important part is that you caught someone I believe"

"We did, you saved our asses. The country housewives were scared to lose their husbands and fathers. Two or three area churches were talking about getting involved. It was a social powder keg. Though, you turned out to be wrong about the intimate accomplice."

Hannibal held his hands wide, not quite a shrug, close enough.

"It's true, I'm a completely fallible human being. You've discovered my secret, Agent Crawford. Whatever am I to do now?"

Jack laughed in the easy way of a man well versed in the politics of social power.

"Ha Oh No, I hope this doesn't mean you'll have to kill me to protect your secret"

"Hmm well I admit that's not without some temptation. However I think for now this secret isn't so urgent. A paid consultation should be a completely satisfactory solution to our small problem."

Chuckling, Jack took his hat off, pulled up his brief case, and got out the pictures from the scene.

"So before I hand you these pictures, my first question is, do you think this is the Chesapeake Ripper changing his MO?"

Hannibal blinked, the question took him off guard.

"You think The Ripper might be changing his MO?"

"Well he could be, we're not any closer to catching him than we've ever been. He must feel untouchable. It would be a mistake to assume we know everything The Ripper is capable of, part of my job is covering every possible angle."

The absurdity of getting a pep talk from the man tasked with catching him appealed to Hannibal's sense of whimsy. Inside, he smiled just a tiny bit at that as he accepted the stack of crime scene photos.

"A fair point Jack. I will endeavor to keep an open mind. If you could walk me through what you know while I look at what our killer left us."

"Of course, as you can see it's incredibly savage. Jeremy Williams, father of one. His ex wife wasn't aware he was missing. No close family in the area. The ex had a restraining order on him. He was found up there by one of his fishing buddies early this morning. The body is posed, kneeling. He'd been bathed in the lake itself. The incisors were pulled out, his heart was completely removed with clean decisive cuts. The intestines were removed from the body cavity but not detached. He's holding those... Like a baby? Or protecting them? Both his thumbs and his tongue were bitten off but there is something off about the bite pattern. We

haven't determined what specifically yet. My people are taking molds to get a better idea. The victim's face is.... distressing I suppose, he looks terrified."

"Hmm, and what's the shiny thing in his mouth? A coin?"

"Yeah, it's a coin. Not like anything I've seen before, here. I think this might be why Alana referred me to you. You're good with religious iconography Dr Lecter?"

Jack handed Hannibal an evidence bag holding a good sized silver coin.

"I was raised with religion in the home, it's left me with an interest and awareness of certain reoccurring thematic elements common in religious iconography. I suppose Alana, is not incorrect"

The coin was a hobo nickel carved into a lovely detailed picture of a templar knight looking for the holy grail. Hobo nickels were regularly made by homeless nomadic men beginning in the 1910's to trade for money or food when they didn't have other more traditional ways to pay their way. This was not an original, a poor quality copy probably easily available online. Left in his mouth to pay his way to the after life maybe? It held an interesting duality, coins for teeth, coins for a way forward after death. Hannibal licked his lips a little, thoughtful.

"Well Jack, the good news is that this isn't The Chesapeake Ripper"

"You're sure?"

Hannibal let himself chuckle slightly at that, little did they know.

"Yes Jack, I'm sure. The thumbs and tongue are-"

"Brutal?"

~~-*Beautiful*-~~

"Well, it's..."

~~-*Brilliant*-~~

"... not The Ripper's style..."

~~-*Art*-~~

"He prefers blades. It's what he's comfortable with"

Maybe The Ripper was over due to get out of his comfort zone

"And The Chesapeake Ripper isn't a dentist Jack. I understand how you see a similar level of complexity here but this is a different killer with a different message, a different motive, different goals"

"Dammit Will said the exact same thing, uncanny. Do you guys have a social club or something?"

"We guys Jack?"

"The consultants, Will said the same thing, that the ripper wasn't the type to take up hobby dentistry."

"Really? Perhaps I should meet him so we can compare notes..."

"I don't know if that's a good idea Doctor Lecter. Will isn't on this case to begin with. He's brilliant and every bit as rude. You're one of the most urbane, charming men I've ever met. I can't imagine how poorly that would go. You two would be oil and water"

"If you think that's best, still, I can't help be a bit curious about this Will. He's a profiler?"

"Yes and no, like yourself, not really, he's a professor at Quantico, he helps us out on our most complicated cases. He's very good but doesn't do well with people and doesn't like to disrupt his routine. So what can you tell us about the perpetrator Dr Lecter?"

Hannibal looked at the photos in front of him, this was beautiful, complex. How much should he tell them? Usually he wouldn't want some random sloppy serial killer in his back yard... But this wasn't just some random sloppy serial killer. He was an artist.

"Hmm well likely... a man, white, professional, early thirties to late forties, organized, all the usuals. He's done this before, many times. He knows his... appetites, his... desires. Perhaps at one point there was hesitation, not anymore. Now, he knows what he wants, what he needs. He's had a complicated past that makes him feel-, he has difficulty with connections,.. he's looking for something. Something he feels was taken from him unfairly. Something he's furious about losing... heartbroken too perhaps... He's... desperate for some sort of resolution to a problem that has no resolution and if makes him inconsolable"

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? He could be like you...

Jack rubbed his chin as he looked at the pictures, thinking.

"And you think he's a dentist?"

"Not necessarily, many professions or experiences could give someone a familiarity with the mechanics of pulling teeth. The military, medics, some nurses, veterinarians, small town doctors, some big game hunters, taxidermists, etc"

"That's a long list, but a good start. Thanks so much for your time Doctor"

"Not at all Jack, my pleasure."

Hannibal was glad they'd met in his office. As soon as Jack left and he could safely, he went digging through his art history books to find the painting the body had been posed to resemble. He knew it was familiar. He finally found it. A childhood full of Russian culture meant the reference was immediately reminiscent of something he'd seen before. It was **Ivan**

the Terrible and His Son Ivan on 16 November 1581, painted by Ilya Repin, a painting both controversial and renowned in Russia. The palpable despair of a terrible father in shock, mourning the loss of a perhaps unlovable son. The father's face was pallid, his beard and mouth appearing blood soaked from his son's fatal head wound. The metaphorical consumption of a child.

Hannibal turned back to his books until he found the painting he was looking for, the one that seemed to be in conversation with this one, **Saturn Devouring His Son** by Francisco Goya. This stark painting showed another terrible father, consuming his son in the dark, this time literally. Saturn's face was stricken with devastated visceral horror. Both fathers wore similar expressions, both eternally trapped in the horrified realization that they were responsible for their own child's death.

If was perfect

Hmmm he needed to check the Rolodex for a man and his adult son that were both due for a lesson in manners. The last time he'd been to the opera there were a couple people that went on the list despite his loss of passion for creating. Thank goodness life long habits kept him on task even when his mind was wandering further astray then was his typical. Today those habits made finding the right people for his new project easy.

A father and son pair who'd been in the peripheral of his social circle forever. They spent the last show he went to loudly bragging about beating animal cruelty charges for owning and running a dog fighting ring, despite their contentious personal relationship and inability to cooperate with each other, because they had the right lawyers, status, and enough money to get away with anything. They were disruptive and annoying... and something in his gut told him this new killer, with his mouth full of a predator's teeth, would approve of his choice. Maybe The Chesapeake Ripper was changing his MO after all.

Hannibal smiled, dark and dangerous.

One Two, The Ripper's coming for you

Hannibal thought he ought to send Alana a basket of hand cured meats and cheeses in thanks for being her presumptuous self. He often found that part of her nature a bit aggravating. Today however she'd unknowingly given him an incredible gift, the gift of potential. He closed the office early that day. The paperwork could wait, he had a lot to prepare before dinner and for the first time in a long time, he was eager for the preparation.

♥

Will got home much later then he'd intended. No matter how closely he watched the time, he was always either very late or very early. Time was his nemesis... or at the very least they were star crossed lovers... maybe both.

Letting himself into the house was nice, Buster jumped up on his knees, excited as always, doing his little yippy terrier greeting dance. Winston was new to their small pack, he was still unsure of Will but slowly coming around. One of the ways they got used to each other was floor time, or Will sitting on the floor in the living room just existing in Winston's space until the shy stray felt comfortable enough to rest his head politely on Will's knee. Floor time was becoming a pleasant after work ritual. Sometimes when he was hanging out with his dogs like this, Will imagined how much warmer he would be with a whole pack of dogs. Dogs needed stability though and in his bones Will knew he couldn't give any dogs in his life the long term stability they deserved. His life was ill fated, so he went without.

Maybe the universe created him to be a solitary animal, to live forever in loneliness. Perhaps that was the nature of his becoming carved not from granite but silence... or maybe he was completely full of shit.

Once the puppy greetings were done, Will pulled his creaking body up off the floor before one of his long suffering joints froze up. If he waited to long to get up off the floor, it would be a a lot worse then a little grumbling about bad knees. The reward for moving before inertia really set in was allowing himself to relish the fragrant sweet and savory barbecue deliciousness coming from his crock pot. He didn't cook to much but when he made barbecue, it was always so good to come home to the rich scent of smokehouse barbecue filling the whole house. It made him slightly less lonely and even more hungry.

He dug around in his unsorted kitchen drawers until he found a slotted spoon. Will snickered, imagining generations of southern mothers scandalized by the disorganization of his kitchen. He had coffee filters, butter knives, two forks, one lonely mid sized spoon, kitchen shears, corn holders, pot holders, rubber bands, and a broken butter dish shoved into one drawer. If he had a mother to comment she would despair. Wringing her hands and telling him that no woman would ever love him if he lived like a wild thing.

It was just as well, he'd rather be loved by a wild thing if anyone could ever love him at all, then there might at least be some honesty between them.

"*And what shoulder, & what art,*

Could twist the sinews of thy heart?

And when thy heart began to beat,

What dread hand? & what dread feet?

And what great crimson joy with his dark secret love does thy life destroy?

... What do you think pups? It's William Blake... more or less. He was a man who knew homoerotic torment. I'll give him that."

The dogs of course had no opinions about either William Blake, or William Graham's homoerotic torment. They were just hoping for a little dropped barbecue... well Buster was. Winston hadn't quite some around to sampling Will's barbecue yet. He would though, Buster

did eventually and dogs were nature's eternal optimists. He envied the simplicity of their hope.

The easiest way to get meat off the bone in his opinion, if you had the time and inclination, was crock pot barbecue. He had both the time and the inclination. Of course that did mean he had to fish the bones out once the barbecue was done. There were only four bones to find thankfully, two distal phalanxes, and two proximal phalanxes. It took a minute for him to locate the bones in the barbecue.

Maybe it was silly but his favorite part of crock pot barbecue day was this moment right here. There was something so sensual, so taboo, so absolutely reprehensible about sucking home made barbecue sauce off of a dead man's thumb bones before he washed them. It made him yearn for things he couldn't have.

He'd suck the blood and barbecue sauce off the fingers of a living man if he ever met one that was fearless, faithful, and forceful enough to even try putting their fingers in his mouth. For a man to survive that he'd have to be something or someone very special...

It didn't seem likely that was in the cards for him, he'd tried before with other hunters, he'd had partners before... they just... never had anything to offer him that was more interesting then their deaths. Maybe the Chesapeake Ripper, his crime scenes were poetry. Poetry Will would happily read forever. Every time Jack took him to a Chesapeake Ripper body, he wanted to roll around in the artistry, lick the blood from his fingertips. It took all his self control to not tell them that The Ripper was brilliant, that they'd never catch him without Will's help, and Will wasn't really helping, not really. Some beasts shouldn't be caged.

As if thinking about The Ripper brought the harshness of reality crashing back down on him, Will abruptly remembered himself. As much as disassociating in the kitchen all night sounded like a fucking party, Will had shit to do.

"Stop yer naval gazin boy. How in the hell can you be so smart and so damn dumb at the same time? People er gonna think yer funny you go round gawpin like that"

His dad always had mean things to say when he got to distracted for to long. Old bad memories bubbled under his skin. No, none of that, not tonight.

Shoving his brain back on task manually, Will made himself a sloppy barbecue sandwich, collected the clean phalanges and incisors, called the dogs, then headed out to the garage to organize his special tackle box. It was a kill trophy collection, he wasn't in denial about it. It'd be silly for him to lie to himself about the nature of his enjoyment of them. He knew It was dangerously risky to keep it around, but he loved it to much to stop.

Each tooth, each knuckle bone, took him back to that kill. So, he was sentimental about his kills. It's not as if he'd ever successfully connected with a living human. Unless some perfect being dropped in his literal lap, this was it for him and he'd enjoy it however he felt so inclined, barring the appearance of a murderous miracle man.

"Mister Sandman, send me a man, a man with blood on his hands, send me a man devoted and mine. Mister sandman send me a dreeaaammm"

Or a bullet in the temple, whichever seemed most appropriate

Will laughed dryly at himself as he dropped the teeth and small bones into their proper sections in the tackle box. All the southern mothers would be relieved to know that this at least he kept meticulously well organized.

The cool soothing feeling of ever so slowly pressing his fingers into the dividers full of incisors calmed him. He particularly loved the sound of stirring the teeth around. They made a comforting clicking clacking sound. Murder ASMR. Will chuckled. If there was a market for serial killer humor, he'd be the king of that. The world just didn't know how to appreciate Will Graham properly. He was *deeply* deprived obviously.

After he was done eating and stim playing with his teeth, he double checked his dental veneers for any damage or imperfections. He'd made them himself with so many sharpened human teeth. They were his pride and joy. Occasionally one of the pointy teeth would break off in someone and need replaced. When he first finished it, It'd taken him months to learn how to speak clearly when he had it in his mouth. It was magnificent now though, it gave him the freedom to bite all he wanted with more ferocity then his human teeth afforded him and he didn't have to worry about being tracked with dental records. Fun and functional.

He wondered what it would be like to kiss someone with his kill teeth in, would the sharpened teeth cut their lips? their tongue? Would the taste of their commingled blood be their favorite aphrodisiac?

Questions that would have to remain unanswered, no one was exactly beating down his door to volunteer for the experiment.

Will's teeth itched with unresolved violent need.

It's to soon. You're escalating Will

He knew he shouldn't be even thinking about the next one yet, but it was the only peace he knew... and he was greedy for every second of relief. If he got caught, well he got caught.

He couldn't bring himself to care anymore

♥

"Will, you'll be happy to know our profiler agrees with you. The Chesapeake Ripper isn't a dentist"

"You mean The Tooth Fairy murder?"

"The Tooth Fairy? What the hell kind of moniker is that? Where do people come up with these names?"

"I don't know Jack, blame the whimsy of serial murder and Freddie Lounds I guess."

"Will"

"Fine fine, I'm glad Alana saw reason."

"It wasn't Alana actually, Dr Hannibal Lecter, he's relatively new to me but a renowned psychiatrist with a fantastic reputation."

"Oh really? He said that specifically? That The Ripper wasn't a dentist? I'd like to meet him Jack"

"Are you actively trying to ruin me Will? No you may not scare off one of my profilers"

"Well where's the fun in that Agent Crawford?"

"There's no fun to be had here Will, it's a man hunt"

"I guesssssss, no one understands my genius Jack. Mine is a life of isolation and such remarkable singularity. I pine for normalcy."

"Right Doctor Graham, I guess it's a good thing we're here so you can understand the serial killers, not so we can understand you"

"Exactly Jack, that's exactly it"

♥

Darren Blevins couldn't explain the depth of his shock finding Dr Hannibal Lecter uninvited, in his living room, in a clear plastic cover all.

"Hannibal what the hell are you doing in my house? ... And what the hell are you wearing man?"

Hannibal inclined his head, the very picture of genteel civility.

"The proclivity for a barrier, I acquired in truth, as a young man in my surgical practice. Old habits, as they say, die hard. I would apologize for disturbing your evening Darren but I'm afraid you and your father have an urgent appointment that you must keep"

His indignation and unearned sense of entitlement burned much to hot in his chest for him to feel the threat hanging over him in the split second before he was dropped with a heavy wet thud to his plush ivory carpet.A blur of movement in the corner of his eye might have warned Darren if the blur wasn't moving faster then his ability to process what was happening.

"What the hell are you talking about Hanni-?"

THUD

Darren Blevins would never speak again

Possibly some screaming, Hannibal would let the vicious inclinations of his muse decide.

Hannibal smiled down at Darren, already able to see the dark beauty he would become as a decadent crimson halo spread below him, slowly seeping into the carpet.

"My apologies Darren, that stain won't be coming out"

It felt good to be back.

He couldn't wait to hear the music of their screaming.

Hannibal hoped the mystery artist, maker of such a gorgeously rendered death, liked the gift.

Just like the man and his art, this too would be beautiful.

Oh, That You Would Give Dust a Tongue

Chapter by Apocalyptic_Space_They

BANG BANG BANG

Will was startled out of restless sleep at the extremely loud and intrusive cop knocking on his door.

3:22 am

Vaguely, Will wondered if Jack was here to arrest him or recruit him. It was distantly interesting to him that he couldn't manage feeling much more then annoyed about it either way. He didn't bother to put pants on before he stumbled into the livingroom to answer the door. Let them be as uncomfortable as he was.

Yanking the door open pulled crisp autumn air rolling in over Will's bare legs, catching the hair there making it flutter, almost ticklish.

"Decent people don't go hammering on people's doors in the middle of the night Jack"

Jack chose to ignore Will's standard snark.

"It's The Ripper Will"

Will leaned against the door jam, making sure to not let any of his excitement leak past the sleepy annoyed professor mask, only rolling his eyes and scowling into the horizon.

"Oh, you know that for sure this time huh?"

Sighing, Jack held an intentionally even reasonable tone.

"Doctor Graham I'm not the head of this department on a whim or on accident, I would appreciate it if you would extend the same courtesy to me, that you so reasonably requested from me. We do know what we're doing Will, even if we get it wrong sometimes. Yeah we're pretty damn sure. The Ripper practically left a business card. He seems pissed that Freddie Lounds implied that The Tooth Fairy might be the Chesapeake Ripper. So since you knew it couldn't be the Ripper, it would help us immensely if you came and told us what you do see now."

Broadly Will felt bad about taking out his boundary enforcement on Special Agent Crawford. Jack wasn't so bad, he was a hunter too in his way. He understood more then he acknowledged about the need to chase and consume. Feeling slightly guilty wouldn't change his behavior though, his boundaries were more important to him... but he wasn't without empathy for the guy who was forced out of necessity to ask someone as miserable and antisocial as him, to help.

Poor bastard.

Maybe just this once, he would show a tiny bit of mercy. He was eager to see what The Ripper had to say anyway.

"I can't say I blame him for being mad Jack. Their Mo's are totally different. Wouldn't you be mad if Freddie Lounds attributed all your hard work to Frederick Chilton? I know I would be... Okay fine, I'm already awake, let me get dressed, give me five minutes"

♥

The crime scene was something else entirely... These deaths, were... It was breath taking. Will couldn't think of a more apt description.

Breathtaking. Stunning. Beautiful.

Jack walked him through everything they knew so far as he surveyed the display.

"Our victims are father and son, Darren Blevins Senior and Darren Blevins Junior. They were recently in some legal trouble for being silent partners in a dog fighting ring. Their lawyers got them cleared of all charges under extremely suspicious circumstances. Darren Blevins Junior has been beheaded, we've not yet found his head. Darren Blevins Senior had his jaw and entire brain removed with surgical precision. The jaw was disarticulated surgically, at the joints, with the tongue, larynx, and segments of the trachea still intact. They were used...almost like a curser. I can't believe I just had to say that, there was calligraphy left at the scene, the the jaw was used to highlight it's significance... Right over there. The message said, **O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue, To cry to thee, And then not hear it crying! all day long*."*

Pausing to wave towards the placid lake shore where the bodies had been so carefully arranged, Jack continued.

"I know you didn't come to the Tooth Fairy scene Will, but this is not only the same lake, it's the exact opposite shore from where the Tooth Fairy victim was found. We could get binoculars and see exactly where we found Mr Williams... Looking at all of this, the location, surgical organ removal, an elaborate brutally derisive presentation... You tell me Will, is it the Ripper?"

"I don't know Jack, it looks like it yeah, give me a minute to do my thing?"

Jack called everyone back to give Will space.

The two Mr Blevins were laid out like the once living embodiments of a painting. Will would have to check later, but he was relatively certain it was Goya. Darren Senior was almost looming over his headless son, holding him around the waist like an oversized popsicle... or something more explicitly phallic. There was an undertone of violent homoeroticism in the

scene as one man literally consumed the other's head. Will stifled a snicker at the word play. Jack wouldn't appreciate The Ripper's dick joke.

Darren Senior's eye lids had been cut away, so he'd be forced to see the wreckage of his consumption eternally. With his jaw removed, his upper lip, teeth, and hard palate were resting on Darren Junior's neck, or more accurately, on the meticulously immaculate surgical wound that was what was left of Junior's neck.

That was a significant divergence from the painting, which portrayed the son's neck as violently tooth ravaged stump. This... This was a careful measured response, a knock on the door, an even if they can't see us, I can see you and will answer in turn... it was almost a proposition.

This scene said we have different appetites, different skills but I hear you, and i want to know more... it was brilliant... intimate, a promise or a request, lovely. The perfect response to his kill. Here was another bad father literally consuming his son... and these men were animal abusers too. Will wondered what it was about his kill that gave him away as a dog lover. He'd never in his life felt so seen, so understood. It was thrilling and terrifying.

Fuck he wanted to pick the Ripper's brain so bad. It took every bit of self control he had to hide his exhilaration. He could feel his hands shaking in a contained sensually violent excitement. That was fine, the FBI agents all thought he was terribly fragile. They'd assume he was just a poor little kitten overwhelmed by the brutal violence on display here.

The Chesapeake Ripper saw him, he understood. The Ripper understood. Will could almost cry. He wanted to cry, wanted to tear The Ripper's throat out with his kill teeth, with his real teeth. He wanted to kiss The Ripper thoroughly as the life poured out of him in a waterfall of exquisite crimson, soaking them both.

Ecstasy.

Will wanted like he'd never wanted another human being before, furiously, voraciously, unendingly.

The question now was how much to tell Jack... How much should he leak to Freddie anonymously? Lust and the hunt fueled him, fed the fire burning his belly. Once he had the scent of his prey, they'd never shake him loose. In his giddy excitement for this particular hunt, Will rolled the dice on being a little bit impulsive, he needed more, so much more, immediately. He gestured Jack back over to him, allowing a shiver to pass over him. Jack would see it as disgusted horror. Will took everything in with adoring attention to detail as he explained.

"The poem he left is called Denial, by George Herbert. In it, he has writer's block basically, he's lost his joy in life, his inspiration. So he's on his knees begging god to hear his prayers, to give him love, divine inspiration, his very life back... and in so doing, give him his art back as well. No matter how fervently he prays, his desperate need is never given any respite, god never hears or responds. The poem has more then a little homoerotic subtext. The denial here is pointed at us for thinking he's The Tooth Fairy... and he might be inviting The Tooth Fairy to.... respond in kind"

"Ok, so what does that mean for us Will? Historically The Ripper has been territorial, are we looking at a turf war between serial killers?"

Will thought about that question, for once, with the exact intensity he appeared to be considering it.

"... No... this is different then what we've seen from him before. Those precise surgical wounds, those are directed at us, like a parent teaching a child his colors. He's frustrated with us, our lack of understanding, with a world that can't hear a melody that's pervasively obvious to him. He's frustrated that you'd think he had the same appetites as The Tooth Fairy so he's illustrating the differences for us, loudly, hoping we won't miss it again... inviting The Tooth Fairy to illustrate their differences to us as well"

"A frustrated serial killer seems bad for everyone, are you sure he's inviting The Tooth Fairy to... what? Play with him? That doesn't seem like The Ripper we know at all. What do you make of the victims having a history of cruelty to animals? We've never seen The Ripper pass moral judgement on his victims before. So what's changed?"

"I don't know Jack, I think that just because we've never seen him pass judgement on someone, it doesn't mean he hasn't. If we look at his victims and only see the possiblity of rude customer service workers and low level retail employees, that says more about what we believe is a worthy reason to kill someone, then his actual reasons for killing them"

"That's why we have you Doctor Graham, so you can tell us his actual reason for killing them"

Will nodded sideways, chin out slightly, an almost shrug acknowledging Jack's point.

"Ok, this... Isn't new in the broad strokes, but the details are different. Before, he was screaming into the void, despairing but resolute. Now he's found an audience, a peer to whom he can speak directly. In his rejoicing at the potential of no longer being alone, his explosive screaming becomes a pointed, directed overture, alluring. A request as shiny, sharp, precise, and dangerous as his scalpel. The denial is for us, the art is for The Tooth Fairy directly. Heaven help anyone who comes between him and his prey, god save the fool who comes between his prey and him"

Jack rubbed his face in deep exhaustion.

"So you're telling me that two of the most brutal, exacting serial killers we've ever seen are... what? Lonely? Flirting?"

Will scrunched his shoulders in a small, unimpressed shrug of acknowledgement.

"I don't think The Ripper would put it so inelegantly, but sure. The monsters are calling to each other in the dark Jack. Now what are you gonna do?"

"Now, I'm gonna catch them and put them away forever Dr Graham"

Looking out over the lake to the spot where he left his first message to The Ripper, Will smiled a ruthless, pointed smile for no one but himself.

Jack Crawford was a hunter too, through and through.

This little dinner party was about to get wild.

Will Graham, aka The Tooth Fairy, couldn't wait for the fun to start.

He did love to get his hands dirty.

♥

O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue

To cry to thee,

And then not hear it crying! all day long

My heart was in my knee,

But no hearing.

-

Therefore my soul lay out of sight,

Untuned, unstrung:

My feeble spirit, unable to look right,

Like a nipped blossom, hung

Discontented

-

O cheer and tune my heartless breast,

Defer no time;

That so thy favors granting my request,

They and my mind may chime,

And mend my rime.

- excerpt, Denial

♥

Against his better judgement, Hannibal let Dr Bloom invite him to a working lunch at the BAU. Apparently the entire department was buzzing with gossip about the new Ripper murder and dear Mz Bloom wanted to get his opinion on some of their star profiler's assumptions. She said his ideas were unusual. Curious.

Of course he asked her what exactly she was concerned about, she was very evasive. That didn't necessarily mean anything. Alana was an avid devotee of middle class urbane decorum. As such she was often evasive simply because direct honesty is almost never the decorous thing to do. It was boring but technically polite as far as motivations go.

Hannibal packed up a nice picnic basket with Sweetbread stew and cucumber sandwiches for lunch with his colleague and headed out.

Walking into the FBI building the day after the discovery of one of his creations always felt taboo to the point of being salacious. Today even more so, the whole building seemed to be thrumming with tension. It pleased him though he was very careful not to let it shine through on his face. Outwardly he was always the slightly detached, polite psychologist.

As he neared the elevator on his way to Dr Bloom's office. He saw that both Alana and Jack were talking to a slouchy young man with dark, liberally mussed hair. Hannibal slowed down minutely to give them time to bring their conversation to a resolution. He didn't care for a delay being introduced to some student angry about low grades or extracurriculars. Though the man had his back to Hannibal, his bearing was obviously frustrated. He was wearing grungy beat up jeans and a tweed jacket that was at least fifteen years out of date. As Hannibal approached, the young man startled slightly, cocking his head for a split second like he was listening for something. The moment was over so fast, it might have been anything. Just when Hannibal was accepting he would have to spend time meeting him, the man shook his head sharp and derisive, grumbled "whatever" at Jack and slumped off with an ambivalent shrug.

The man, apparently no more interested in meeting Hannibal, then Hannibal was interested in meeting him, kept his eyes on the ground, mostly facing away. The only proof that the young man even knew Hannibal was there, was a whisper of derisive laughter when he saw Hannibal's shoes and slacks.

The impertinence of adolescents today, how incredibly rude.

As the man walked away, something behind Hannibal plucked at his senses, made his inner predator growl. This wasn't the time for that, given the circumstances he was probably just feeling paranoid. He kept his face carefully neutral as he greeted his colleagues.

"Alana, Jack, Lovely to see you. One of your students giving you trouble over a grade Mz Bloom? Would you like me to speak to him?"

Both Jack and Alana laughed, though it didn't seem to be directed at him. Alana sighed loudly and looked over Hannibal's shoulder at the back of the retreating presumed student.

"I wish that was a student upset with their grades, that would be easy enough to deal with. No that's our other star profiler Doctor Lecter, Professor Graham"

Hannibal was very careful! to only appear casually curious as he turned around to look. Unfortunately the man was already gone. He blinked in vaguely irritated shock. That rude young man was his competition? How incredibly... Insufferable. Perhaps he should eat him.

"That was Dr Graham? The professor who knew that The Tooth Fairy wasn't The Chesapeake Ripper?"

Jack nodded, seeing and perfectly understanding Hannibal's disbelief. The inconsistent brilliance of Will Graham was something that took some adjusting to.

"One and the same"

Hannibal blinked in thought. It was mildly disappointing for someone with any interesting insight to be so banal and rude, but it wasn't surprising. Most people were both rude and boring.

"Well, Jack it appears you've made the correct call. You're quite right, I might throttle that man if I had to spend time with him. Now if you would, please join us for lunch."

Jack laughed affably.

"Everyone wants to throttle Will at some point, so you'd be in good company. Lunch? I'd hate to impose though I've heard you make delicious meals"

"Nonsense Jack, I won't hear another word, I brought enough for everyone. Please join us, I know Alana wanted to discuss work anyway, so this is quite fortuitous."

"Oh well in that case I'd love to. What's for lunch?"

"Oh a lovely traditional French sweetbread stew and cucumber finger sandwiches. They offset each other perfectly."

The elevator binged as the doors slid open. Jack stepped in and turned back to Hannibal as he and Alana followed him into the small space.

"Sounds delicious, so you heard about the new Ripper murder Doctor? I'd love your second opinion if you don't mind"

"I believe that's what Alana wanted to speak to me about as well. Of course I don't mind Jack, please continue."

♥

Will sat behind the wheel of his truck, letting the anxiety drain off of him before he tried going anywhere. He didn't love driving at the best of times, much less when he was on the verge of having a meltdown. Something in that lobby set off his inner threat alarms, but what? Who? Maybe it was just the excitement of finally getting The Ripper's attention that had him overly wound up... Maybe, but he didn't really think so.

Across the parking lot The Stag stood watch over him, shaking it's head and pawing the ground, aggravated. Will sighed in reciprocal exasperation.

"What man? Unless you're gonna tell me what has you so worked up. I don't know. It's probably nothing. Plaid slacks? That's preposterous. Guy's probably a professor trying to woo Alana. Good luck to him for whatever that's worth. I am being careful. I'm ok. We're ok. Ok?"

Finally mollified, The Raven Stag faded back into the recesses of Will's mind.

"Get it together Will, if anyone stumbles on you arguing with your imaginary friend about murder, it could become a problem"

Closing his eyes, he went back over the conversation he'd had with Alana and Jack. His mind palace holding the memory bright and vibrant for him. They were standing by the elevators. Jack was pushing to put Will on their roles in an official on call status profiler. They argued, the click clacking in the hallway, echoing off the walls, it sounded like hooves for a second, startled him. He didn't like it when the stag showed up while he was around people. It felt much to vulnerable, distracting. The Stag was his business, no one else's.

The sound rattled him enough to tear his focus away from the conversation. He needed to get out of there right thrn. Out of habit and meticulous self protection habits, Will kept his eyes down and his body collapsed in on itself as he walked away.

As he slid away from his colleagues, Will instinctually looked for the source of the clicking hoof sounds in his peripheral vision and found it in a pair of absurdly shiny dress shoes below red and blue plaid slacks. Red and blue plaid slacks?

Ok Captain America, what the actual fuck? Maybe tone it down a little buddy, before you catch the wrong person's eye and they decide to turn you into a midnight snack

Having realized what exactly had set off his internal perimeter alarm, Will was able to set it aside. He had bigger fish to fry right then. Like the fact that he needed to decide what he was going to say to the Chesapeake Ripper now that he had his attention.

Oh Damn He was going to talk to The Chesapeake Ripper in his favorite language of blood and bone

That thought sent a shivery sticky thrill through his whole body. Fuck, he couldn't wait to expand his trophy collection specifically for The Ripper. The promise of them connecting in any way, was more engaging, more exciting then anything he'd felt in a very long time

Heart pounding, blood thrumming, he felt invincible, god like in his ability to demand The Chesapeake Ripper's attention.

He wouldn't wait now. He knew that, not with The Chesapeake Ripper waiting for him.

You had to reel the fish in when it took the bait or it might break the line and swim away.

He was so close now, he couldn't risk waiting

He'd been concerned about his escalation before, now he was already anticipating further escalation.

Anything to catch the flash of The Chesapeake Ripper's scalpel

Anything at all

♥

THE DEVIL'S OWN, MATCH MADE IN HELL

In a move that should be terrifying every single sane decent person on the Eastern Sea Board, anonymous sources inside the BAU have confirmed that The Chesapeake Ripper and the disturbingly vicious new kid on the murder block, The Tooth Fairy, have been communicating through their horrifyingly gruesome crime scenes. A source that couldn't be named said,

"I don't know, Im not a serial killer so what do I know? What I do know though, is how two men proposition each other safely in a room full of straights... people, no judgement to the cishets of course. Oh my god, my mother always says I never know when to end a story. God never tell her she's right. So the real hot gossip? I've seen a lot of death in my life, and I've seen a whole lot of cock too, and that? That looks flirty to me. I mean bloody and disgusting... but flirty"

So is love in the air? Are serial killers capable of love even? We may not know until the streets are already stained scarlet. One thing is certain, if you're a bad parent, if you have a history of animal or child abuse... now might be the time to get out of town, before two become one, or they might come after you next

Tobias closed the Tattle Crime website, in clipped frustration. The possessive fury in his gut was burning so hot, it spiked angry and mean behind his eyes.

The fucking Tooth Fairy. He knew it had to be his ex boyfriend... Will, it had to be... The biting, the daddy issues. Tobias actually texted him about it after the first Tooth Fairy Victim hit the news, but Will left him on read. Imagine leaving him on read. Will could be such a self righteous, insufferable little asshole.

Still Will was Tobias's obnoxious prick. Just because they weren't together currently didn't mean The Chesapeake Ripper could just swan in and have what was his. If the Ripper thought he could, he would be in for a very rude awakening.

Will was his to play, to pull beautiful music out of. Tobias didn't share his instruments with the musically disadvantaged.

Someone had to put a stop to this atrocity. If it had to be him, it had to be him.

He had ways to get what he wanted out of a man... All he had to do was apply the correct amount of pressure, play all the right notes, soon enough They would sing...

and bleed.

Terror, The Human Form Divine

Chapter by Apocalyptic_Space_They

Jack Crawford was persistent, Will supposed he had to give the man that. He'd asked Will to join the Tooth Fairy task force four times in three days. At this rate he might have to put them both out of their misery by putting Jack out of his, permanently.

The thing was he knew it would be safer for him to be on his own task force, he just couldn't bring himself to care enough. He had a routine, a ritual if you will, for after a kill, and none of it involved spending hours being yelled at by Jack Crawford. It was his only time of peace. He couldn't give it up for the opportunity to corrupt his own evidence. If he got caught so be it. Life was pointlessly redundant anyway. He doubted prison would be a whole lot worse then the emotional isolation prison he was already in.

Trapped

Will spent most days feeling like screaming.

After a lifetime of always feeling like screaming, every moment of every day, he was afraid once he started, he'd never stop, so he held his misery in for another day. That's just how things were, the way they'd always been. He was absolutely not willing or able to pile more on his stress level with The Toothfairy task force.

"No Jack, I'm not joining your super squad. I don't *do* team ups. You know that, go bother someone else about it."

The stag, his protector, watched him from the hallways of his mind, concerned.

Jack, solid and serious, frowned at Will's refusal.

"Dr Graham, please reconsider. Freddie ran that article about The Ripper and This Tooth Fairy flirting, with an anonymous source from our own task force. Your vision, your ability to predict a killer's next move, it could save a lot of lives on this one."

"Look Jack, I get it. The FBI is embarrassed that Freddie Lounds called you murder Grindr. You and I both know the institution's suffered much worse slander than that. You big bad feds will be fine. Freddie always has some shit to say, my being on your task force won't change that."

Sometimes it was for the best that everyone thought he was a sad broken little thing. So when he started vibrating with barely contained murderous rage, they always thought he was overwhelmed, not a centimeter from gouging out their eyeballs with his thumbs. It was the little things.

Will looked pointedly at Jack.

"But fuck my life right? We don't care about how much it eats me up, how much it hurts me. My life isn't worth caring about, isn't worth protecting. No we're perfectly comfortable burning the little weirdo up, sucking that teat till there's nothing left but dust and pain. Then *we'll all cry and wring our hands, so very sorry, so very sad. We didn't know, we didn't mean to. We have regrets.* I think the fuck not. No Jack, which part of, I only work the cases you can't close without me, are you having trouble with? That list begins and ends with The Chesapeake Ripper. The Tooth Fairy has dropped, what? One body that we know of? He's virtually a little murder toddle baby, we don't even know for certain he's serial, he's not even close to your living death god. Talk to me when he has something interesting to say, when he's The Ripper's equal, when he's had you chasing your tail for years"

Behind Jack The Stag shook his head and pawed the ground, warning Will to tread more carefully.

Trying to intimidate Will into compliance, Jack got in Will's face.

"Fine Will, I get it. I can't force you to help. Just remember, from here on out, any lives The Tooth Fairy takes, are on your conscience. Because you could've stopped him and chose not to. I hope you've been sleeping real well lately"

To bad Will'd faced down much scarier men then Special Agent Jack Crawford. This wasn't a thing he was going to change his mind on.

"I'm at peace with my choices Jack. How about you? How're you sleeping lately?"

Will didn't give Jack a chance to try again, shrugging and pushing past him.

"Now, if you'll excuse me. I have a class to teach."

Behind him, Will could feel Jack's eyes on him, an aging hunter trying to decide whether giving chase was worth the effort of the fight.

Will walked a little faster, his guardian, the stag keeping pace with him, eyes alert but sad, keeping the world at bay even when he was making worrisome choices.

A smattering of Indigo black feathers were sprouting from the stag's thick protective brown fur. Not many, a few at the base of his antlers. The Stag sighed, shaking his head so a lone black feather... A Raven feather, floated gently to the ground.

Will squinted slightly at his companion, trying not to draw attention to himself.

What's with you man?

As if in direct answer, the stag looked to the horizon of the rivers and mountains that were the heart of Will's mental peace, his memory palace. He raised his eyes to a slowly rising sun and howled a low, piercing, lonely bugling call, the sound Elk made to call to each other across great distances. At first there was no response.

Then one lone Raven landed in a near by branch, rustling his feathers and making strange arcane sounds that were not unlike the stag's pining cry. The two animals watched each other

in silent communication.

The Raven fluffed his feathers and called in his natural voice, a gravely ominous sound. In the distance another Raven answered in kind, then another. First one Raven landed in the stag's antlers, then another, and another. More and more Raven's joined the flock until the world was nothing but A dark cloud of raspy screaming Ravens, whipping around like an eardrum shattering tornado, eclipsing everything

Get it together Will

He tried to push the image away, only succeeding in quieting them. In the wilds of his mind every single Raven landed wherever it could find space. Thousands of beady black eyed birds cocked their heads and stared at him like he was a particularly fat and juicy mouse.

Panic stabbed at his chest, his wrists, behind his eyes. The ravens made a strange clicking sound that almost sounded like hooves on tile, but not quite. The dread turned to something near excitement, terror, and blood lust.

The Ravens seemed satisfied and as one took off, wheeling happily in the sky.

The Stag pawed and huffed at him, impatient, annoyed.

Will considered not giving in and looking at the stag, leaving him to stew with whatever the fuck that was supposed to be about, but curiosity won out and he looked.

The Stag stood in a wide open land, there was an eclipse hanging low in the sky behind him. He shook his great body like a wet dog.

Will realized that his stag had tons of feathers now, indigo black Raven feathers were growing all through his fur.

The Stag watched him in a mild curiosity.

What if I don't want to become something new?

The Stag didn't answer, instead turning his back on Will, walking in his slow certain way towards the eclipse. Will would be ready to become when he was ready. The Stag had faith.

Will shook the image out of his head, closed his eyes to center himself and realized abruptly that his body had autopilot brought him to his classroom. Which was reasonable since that was where he'd been going, but the idea of crossing the wires of Professor Graham& The Stag made him mildly nauseous.

He pushed open the door, sliding into that old tweed person suit as painlessly as possible.

"Hey Kids, sorry I'm a little late, Agent Crawford, yes The Special Agent Jack Crawford, held me up. Now, who can tell me what a flock of Ravens is called?"

One of the kids, tipped his chair to far back on its back legs teetering

"Dude, Prof, is that gonna be on the test?"

"Kyle, that's Mr Dude Prof or Doctor Dude Prof, to you. There is more to learning then memorizing things for tests"

"Yeah ok, but like is it?"

Will definitely wasn't imagining hunting this young man for sport. He took a deep calming breath.

"Well it is now. Everyone thank Kyle for the corvid unit. Now, as I was saying, a flock of Ravens...?"

Two of Kyle's boys threw paper wads at him for getting them an excessive unit on birds, apparently. A smattering of voices yelled things all at once, everything from a murder to a nevermore, points for punning on that one. Will set his satchel on his desk, and pulled out his chair.

"Ahh a murder is a flock of crows. A flock of Ravens is called an unkindness, possibly because seeing one was thought to bring bad luck. Now, tell me what we know about The Chesapeake Ripper"

❤️

👤

actually I own a Tesla budge

Will you can't keep me on read forever

I know it's you

I did it you know

The thing you said I didn't have the creativity for

Just like you said

Will

Dammit you can't just ignore me Will

I know your secret

Imagine what I could do with it

.

Yeah I'm aware "Maestro"

You're still plagiarizing

It's boring not creative

You're boring

Threatening me won't change my mind

You know, my dad was a mean miserable man

But survivor tough

He used to always tell me

don't let your mouth write a check, your ass can't cash Billy

Tobias, If you cash that check

You better be prepared to pay the price

The cost'll be awfully fuckin steep

Now kindly go fuck yourself

.

You'll regret treating me like this Will

.

I'm already regretting you

Go bother someone who's impressed with your bullshit

Go bother your friend Franklin

I'm sure he'll validate your sad little ego

All big wet eyes and hero worship

You two deserve each other

❤️

"Dr Lecter, I'm so sorry I got your machine. I only have this work number. No secretary I guess. I was calling to see if you would be interested in being our primary consultant on The Tooth Fairy case. It will be a full moon in two days. Last time he was active it was on the full moon. We're concerned he may strike again. I would feel so much better with your expertise on this one. Just let me know, you have my card."

Hannibal considered the message, drawing the attention of the FBI was always a gamble however having first hand access to the brilliance of The Tooth Fairy's kills might be worth the risk. Perhaps he could even glean some hints about who The Toothfairy was.

Yes, that would be just the thing. Hannibal went to retrieve Jack's card from his rolodex. He'd been planning on killing Special Agent Jack Crawford before his team got to close to connecting Dr Hannibal Lecter, former surgeon and The Chesapeake Ripper, likely surgeon.

It seemed fate had intervened on Jack's behalf. He'd let him live awhile longer if it gave him an extra peak inside the magnificent mind of The Tooth Fairy.

Eager for his next opportunity to do that, Hannibal dialed the number on the card.

"Hello?... Agent Crawford? Yes, I'd be happy to contribute my expertise to your manhunt. I too would most direly like to find the man behind the murder"

❤️

For two weeks, Will had been following Clark Ingram in his spare time, ever since Jack's team swept Peter up in one of their searches.

People who abused their power, especially when the ones they hurt were particularly vulnerable, made Will furious. Usually he chose bad fathers for the honor of being made something better then they were. A gift to their children so that in death the monster might finally give them some peace.

Clark Ingram was insidious in the way he wormed his way into Peter's life, Peter who believed Clark was his friend. So this time, Will was gonna make an exception, go with a father figure, live a little.

Jack was having trouble getting Peter to open up about his social worker, understandably so. He was debilitatingly terrified. The world at large never believed disabled people when they spoke on their own lives. When the authorities looked at Peter they only saw what they believed were his deficits. They didn't care that he was kind, caring, that he knew more about emergency veterinary medicine then all of them put together. They chose to see a broken man and then proceeded to treat him like he was broken.

But Will lived that reality as well, he knew what it felt like to be dismissed before he even spoke because of the way his eyes slid past people's faces or how he held his hands. Yes Will understood, he heard, saw, and Will believed him.

The government was never going to get justice for Peter or any of Clark's victims... fed up with cops protecting institutional violence yet again. Will took to following Clark in his spare

time, just waiting for the creep to give him something useful. There was a field Mr Ingram went walking in regularly. By the third visit Will was all but certain, by the fifth he was deadly certain.

This was where he hid their bodies.

He had the information he needed now all there was to do, was set everything up. He had a live animal trap that has been sitting in the house unattended ever since the days when he was looking for a scared raccoon in his walls. It would serve his purpose now perfectly.

It took him three days to catch two squirrels, one more day to release them in Clark Ingram's house without being seen. He knew from experience the way animal sounds could make you question your reality. Squirrels were, fast, loud, smart, and destructive. He enjoyed the symmetry of animals helping Peter get some form of justice, when the system refused.

Only a little longer now...

The night before the full moon, he went on a little expedition... with a shovel and two very large duffel bags, the kind jocks and military men carried whole constellations of bullshit in. It was time to get to work. It was easy for Will to find Mr Ingram's most recent victims and liberate two of them. Empowering some of Clark's victims to help Will punish the man who took their lives, felt right, like balance. There was a brutal kind of poetry to that.

One more night.

❤️

Clark Ingram was glad to finally be back in his perfect home, where he should be. He hated the stink of that facility. It reeked of poverty and mental weakness.

Right after dinner, Peter had an obnoxious meltdown. The staff at the facility he'd been placed in couldn't get him to stop screaming, self harming, and begging to see his friend, his social worker Mr Ingram. Pathetic. But Clark had to keep up appearances. Which meant he spent hours talking Peter down to make sure he didn't tell Clark's secrets. He should've cut that freak's tongue out when he had a chance. It would've been easier in the long run. He had to promise to check on Peter's animals to get him to shut the fuck up. So upset over animals. Pathetic.

He wasn't going to check on the stupid animals of course. Please if the government hadn't removed them yet, that wasn't his problem.

He was probably going to have to move his disposal spot because of that weakling's *feelings* anyway. Peter owed him.

Clark's house was special. He chose it specifically because it was large and quiet, in a nice neighborhood with enough space sprawling between houses so that no one would ever hear his fragile little cows screaming as he broke them, in a nice enough neighborhood that everyone minded their own business. It was essential that he be able to maintain his privacy.

He took his shoes off, coat, briefcase, keys all in their places. He was just gonna get a beer out of the fridge when he heard a little ***scratching*** sound. Clark froze listening quietly, nothing but the hum of the open refrigerator. He must have imagined it. Closing the fridge, he picked up his beer and-

Scritch scritch

He froze again, listening for anything, intruders, wild animals. Last week two squirrels got into his house somehow. He'd had to pay some weirdo $450 dollars to catch them. The man affirmed that he'd release them somewhere they'd be safe. Like he gave a fuck about the wellbeing of squirrels. It was a fucking joke.

All he cared about was getting those unbearably loud little fuckers out of his walls before they ruined his property value.

No sound... He took another slow step, then another. Nothing. He turned to sit in the livingroom and relax when-

Scritch scritch scraaaaaaasaatch

Now what the hell? He knew he heard that. It was coming from his bedroom. Belligerently annoyed at whatever animal had chewed it's way into his house this time.

Clark busted through the door to his bedroom, hoping a loud noise and his size would scare off any wild animals wandering around in there

"What the hell?!"

The sight on his bed was so unexpected, it took him a second to register, he walked closer to get a better look...

"How the...?"

There were two corpses on his bed. Were they his cows? He couldn't really tell them apart, bitches were all the same, but he thought that probably yes they were his. They were laid out like they were on a royal funeral pyre. One held a sword, like you used to see in Catholic churches, like she was a knight Templar buried with her sword. She had dark curly hair and a... moon carved in her forehead?! The other was posed like Dracula... Or a mummy with a chef knife and... a scalpel?? That one had lighter hair, a stylized sun carved into her forehead

He was so engrossed, so disgusted that he totally forgot himself, until his bedroom door creaked shut with a click. He startled jumped, wielding his half finished beer as a haphazard weapon, the IPA glugged all over him, splashing loudly all over the hardwood floors.

A man was standing there... standing so still... For a minute there was tentative balance, two predators watching each other warily. Clark puffed up his chest, standing as tall as possible, taking up as much space as he could.

"What the fuck?!"

The man didn't respond, he looked sideways at Clark and slowly smiled, baring his teeth. A mouthful razor sharp pointy monster teeth gleamed menacingly in his mouth. Clark felt the world spinning out from under him, his body dry heaved, only gagging up beer and bile.

"Oh God"

The monster cracked his neck, some how his smile got even wider.

"You can scream for your god all you want Mr Ingram. No one will hear you. This is after all, a perfect set up for a serial killer"

The Tooth Fairy rushed him, grabbed the wrist with the beer bottle, redirected his slow swing so Clark slammed the heavy glass bottle into his own face.

Thick chunks of glass dug into his face in several places, gouging bloody divots across his cheekbone and brow. Clark's mind felt molasses slow. How did that happen? How was he hurt? No one could hurt him.

The man slapped Clark out of his fog, reminding him violently that he was at the mercy of the monster who still had a crushing grip on his wrist. The monster snarled

"Nuh-uhh, you don't get to faint now Clark. I want you awake for this, I want you to know you died for your sins, for Peter...and all the women you discarded like trash"

Clark was so confused, his mind wouldn't catch up

"Died? I'm not dead... Peter sent you?"

The Tooth Fairy smirk sneered at him.

"All your victims sent me Clark Ingram, man, woman, and horse. You'll have to forgive the rush job, usually I like to play with my food for awhile, but frankly I have something much more interesting then you to attend to"

With that the monster smiled at him again, all teeth, and bit a huge chunk out of his captive's wrist, blood sprayed the tooth fairy in the face. Clark gurgled hysterical, beyond even screaming.

The Tooth Fairy swallowed the chunk of him with a snarl and scowled, disapproving.

"God, you're so unoriginal, so boring you can't even die with style. You should have stayed in that horse Peter left you in"

With that The Tooth Fairy pulled him slightly forward by his chewed up wrist, grabbed him by the hair, yanked him off balance and ripped a giant chunk of his throat out. Clark's knees gave out as he toppled over, barely conscious.

Clark Ingram lived just long enough to register The Tooth Fairy standing over him, sneering, in an exact replica of Clark's voice, The Tooth Fairy scoffed.

"Pathetic"

When the light left Clark Ingram's eyes, Will smiled, satisfied with the night's work so far.

Still he had a lot ahead of him, he wanted The Chesapeake Ripper to know how much effort, how much care he put into his message.

He was humming happily to himself as he started work on carefully separating Clark Ingram's head from his shoulders.

❤️

Wonderfully Hannibal didn't have to wait very long for a response from The Toothfairy. The afternoon after the full moon, around 1pm Hannibal got the call he'd been waiting for. It seemed that someone distantly related to one of their previous cases had been discovered in his apartment after he didn't show up for work.

Hannibal wondered if he should start clearing his schedule the day after the full moon so he didn't have to worry about conflicting appointments. He didn't want anything to distract from his time with The Tooth Fairy's work.

When he arrived at the scene, he was interested in how secluded the house was, sitting on a decent strip of land. There was no one around to hear if you screamed.

The livingroom in the house was nice, but not to nice, taupe, unremarkable. Everything about Clark Ingram's house said don't notice me, I am tepid, lumpy, and uninteresting. He didn't know this man at all and already he rather agreed with his Tooth Fairy. This man deserved to die. Jack was off to the side talking to his team when he noticed Hannibal.

"Dr Lecter, thank you for coming. Was it to hard to find?"

"Not at all? On the phone you said there were three bodies?"

"Ah yes, the other two had been buried for awhile, it's a bit gruesome in there doctor."

"I'm sure I'll manage. I was an ER surgeon for a time. My stomach is not prone to theatrics. So this is the man that's been all over Freddie Lounds' website, the one who crawled out of a thankfully already dead horse recently?"

Jack lead him down the hall towards the master bedroom.

"This way Doctor, uhh yeah it was a sensational case. A woman was found sewn inside a dead horse, a living bird was found inside the dead woman, we actually thought she had a heart beat if you can believe that. We arrested a man named Peter, in connection with the case. He knew the victim, he'd been injured by a horse, kicked in the head, never quite right after that. He swore he didn't do it. That he was just trying to help her find some peace. He said his social worker did it. Of course he had no proof. We pulled the guy in and interviewed him. But ultimately couldn't keep him on hearsay."

Hannibal took in the scene laid out in such loving detail, in front of him.

"I presume you have a lot more then the word of an injured man now."

"Oh yeah, the killer wanted us to know for sure. Ingram's souvenirs are all laid out over there on the desk"

The bedroom was large, open, with good lighting and hardwood floors. A pricey area rug sat under the bed. Even this inner sanctum spoke to someone who aspired to wealth and notoriety, but did not actually have it.

The man, Clark Ingram was sprawled on his back over the bed. The corpses of two women attacking him, seemingly holding him down. Hmm

Last time the thumbs were gone... And so they were now as well. He noticed that the killer had ripped out Ingram's throat and the inner side of his wrist, with his prosthetic predator teeth.

What a deliciously feral creature The Tooth Fairy was.

"Jack, how are they posed?"

"With a combination of clear wire...uhh like high test fishing line and hidden metal supports...kinda similar to how mannequins are posed?"

Hannibal stood by the door, crouched down, taking the tableau in from every possible angle.

"Fascinating"

Closer, the attention to detail was phenomenal. The women had the symbols for Apollo and Artemis, the Greek deities of the sun and the moon carved carefully into their foreheads. The woman labeled Apollo carried a chef knife and a scalpel. The recognition that it was depicting him, made Hannibal's stomach tingle with anticipation. The woman marked as an avatar of Apollo, was both pinning Clark down and splitting his chest open with her tools... He couldn't be sure from this angle but it looked like her scalpel was looking for his missing heart. Help and harm all at once. Vision and despair intertwined. Hannibal swallowed the stinging lump in his throat.

The sheer exhilarating terror of being seen so clearly.

The woman marked as a child of Artemis had the sword and was slicing the man's throat ruthlessly, he was almost completely decapitated. She had his tongue in her mouth. Well that was definitely our Tooth Fairy.

"Jack has anyone touched them?"

"No we wanted to wait till you'd seen it before we disturbed anything."

"Can I have a glove then?"

Five minutes later he was carefully feeling around in the man's mouth as well as he could to ascertain-, Yes there it was. The coin pressed against the stub of his tongue, canine teeth

missing.

Then he carefully checked the women, they were more fragile, having been buried for at least a couple weeks. A person would have to be very careful in moving and positioning them. The skill was impressive. Very few people would be able to do this successfully, much less make something so... Beautiful. He cleared his throat to get the Agent's attention.

"Jack, these women have all their teeth and their tongues. These two are not The tooth Fairy's kills. I suspect you will find them somewhere in that pile of souvenirs."

Jack looked at the display, in horrified contemplation.

"So why did he..."

"The answer to that is in the painting"

"The painting?"

"**Judith Beheading Holofernes**, the most famous version is likely Caravaggio's. In his version Judith is modeled after his mistress. I think we can surmise the implication. In that painting Judith is a representative of the Virgin Mary, always chaste, demure, and pristine. This is based on the versions painted by Artemisia Gentilesch. In her version, the women are actively taking back their power. Judith is Artemis, goddess of the moon, goddess of the hunt, who chose not to give her power away to a man in marriage. Though there is some evidence that she took lovers. Artemisia, herself named after Artemis had been assaulted, betrayed by her mentor...so she takes this Assyrian General's head because of the way it reminds her of the man that hurt her...whom she didn't want to fear, trading terror for righteous fury."

Jack rubbed his face thoughtfully, scratching the new growth of late afternoon stubble on his jawline idly.

"So, is that why the sun and the moon on them? Because of the artist's use of that imagery?"

~~-*Yes and no, the imagery is a message for the Ripper*-~~

~~*For me*~~

"Presumably yes"

"And then look here what he wrote on the floor."

Drawn in artful bloody block letters, was part of a poem, reciprocation. Hannibal was internally giddy. The Tooth Fairy, could not only see him, but hear him. Being put on this case was... Serendipity.

It was William Blake, which was somehow unsurprising. William Blake made homoerotic pining intro divine art.

The simple bloody scrawl read:

Cruelty has a Human Heart

And Jealousy a Human Face

Terror the Human Form Divine

And Secrecy, the Human Dress

Hannibal didn't have to look up the rest he knew it by heart

~~**The Human Dress, is forged Iron*~~

~~*The Human Form, a fiery Forge.*~~

~~*The Human Face, a Furnace seal'd*~~

~~*The Human Heart, its hungry Gorge**~~

The Tooth Fairy hungered, craved connection with The Chesapeake Ripper with as much passion and sincerity as he hated and dismissed almost everyone else.

Every delicious stroke of this was equal parts calling the world to account for its bad behavior, and inviting The Ripper to join him, in taking themselves back. It was a heady invitation.

Jack shifted his weight, a quiet whisper of wool insulating his movement.

"So what do you think Doctor?"

"About the poem? It's William Blake from a pair of poems summarizing the human condition as a duality between the divine spirit and the intemperate voracious impassioned flesh. I don't know Agent Crawford. I can't be sure, but Freddie Lounds might just be right"

Hannibal considered what to say very carefully.

"It's possible..."

He wants to know me better, wants us to hunt together

"That he's curious about The Ripper, wishes to... know him"

"Anything else?"

"I'm sorry, I'm new to this Jack. I'm used to doing my work at a desk. I'll need to think on it"

Jack, nodded thoughtful.

"So nothing identifying yet?"

That was easily answered... Unfortunately.

"No not yet... However I think if you examine our sweet Artemis and her Artemisia, the ladies he assisted in their revenge, you will find direct straightforward clues to where they were buried, where the rest of Mr Ingram's victims were buried... so you can find them all, pay them the respect they're due"

"You think someone capable of this would be concerned with the respectful posthumous treatment of someone else's victims?"

"Jack, Ingram loathed women. The women he killed, these women, they'll be sex workers, homeless, extremely vulnerable. The Tooth Fairy-"

Hannibal took another long look at Judith taking her power back.

is reclaiming his power with a great and terrible vengeance

"He'd think hunting people that vulnerable was.... inelegant, unoriginal, boring, and banal. He may have a soft spot for vulnerable women... perhaps his mother, an aunt... or even a little sister. Someone that makes him feel protective of people who remind him of her"

Lovely one, Oh how I delight in finding new ways of knowing you. We are alike you and I. Singular but perhaps no longer solitary

... And what a heady thought that was

Lonely but no longer alone

❤️

For the most part Hannibal enjoyed being a doctor of the mind. The human mind was after all a dark, twisted, and haunted place. He felt quite at home there. Still, some of his patients tried every last bit of his extensive patience.

Francis was one of those patients.

Raised with a vast surplus of wealth and an equally vast lack of human compassion, by adults who were admittedly quite casually cruel, Francis imprinted on human predators like a little duckling when he was very young.

He both longed to be, and longed to be closer to, killers. It was his primary personal drive. His past was not his fault, however... and this was an incredibly large however, the way he managed himself now, was. The Francis Dolarhyde of today was self important, arrogant, entitled, troublingly homophobic... and the feather in his cap of Ripper condemnation, he was both boorish and boring. Hannibal might whisper to someone, hoping they become something new and beautiful, an earthly fragment of divinity in the form of a killer... but that didn't mean all of his creations were to his personal taste, or that every potential killer made the cut of being chosen to become one of his incarnations of savage beauty.

Hannibal was on the fence as to whether Francis could be reformed into a killer that had some spark of beauty even if that beauty was not to his taste, or if he was better suited to Hannibal's dinner table. Until he'd made his decision, he did his best to tolerate the various

ways that Francis Dolarhyde was tasteless... Hannibal knew he wasn't a particularly tolerant man. It took all of his self control to take his time deciding.

After all The Chesapeake Ripper was active again, The Toothfairy was out there killing horrible men, making beauty out of beasts... there were many angles to consider.

To add a tinge of alarming intensity to the situation, Francis and his life long hunger for both violence and some sort of direction or leadership, immediately clocked Hannibal as the sort of killer he both wanted to be and wanted to be close to. He wanted to be Hannibal's friend or acolyte, and usually attempted this with petty flattery and petulant demands.

Since The Tooth Fairy started showing up in the news cycle though, Francis shifted his focus a bit. He was still trying to get close to Hannibal, while concurrently becoming increasingly agitated about, and jealous of The Tooth Fairy.

In today's session Francis was extremely fixated on him, offended on behalf of the The Ripper for no sensible reason. It was almost enough to make Hannibal consider killing him immediately... almost. Still Francis might be useful to him so he stayed his hand, and instead subjected himself to endless complaining and whining.

If these people understood how many people he did not kill, how much more peaceful he would find a blissfully silent world of solitude and beauty, they would truly quake in fear.

However they did not, and he meant to keep it that way, so he pretended not to loathe people like Francis Dolarhyde as long as he had to.

Francis, utterly unaware of how close to death he was, continued with his list of complaints.

"I mean Dr Lecter, What Kind of name is The Tooth Fairy? Is he a fairy do you think? Is he propositioning The Ripper? As if the Ripper ever would. He wouldn't would he Doctor? What could that freak offer someone like the The Chesapeake Ripper? The Ripper has style, grace, an education, elegance. That freak bites chunks off people like an animal"

Hannibal settled his hands in his lap so they didn't give away his frustrated murderous inclinations.

"Well, Francis of course we can never completely know another man's mind, certainly not in a situation like this, speculating on the minds of mysterious killers. However one might presume that if The Chesapeake Ripper has such skill, education, and elegance and he sees something exceptional in The Toothfairy, then perhaps he sees something in him that we can't see, knows something we can't know about him"

Francis shuddered and growled in his chair, twisted his face, and tied his body in a tense knot. His mental state so tormented it oozed out of his pores, rank with the stink of fury and insecurity.

"Doctor Lecter if The Ripper would have me, I would happily be the hell hound at the devil's feet. I would be his great red dragon, furious and mighty."

Hannibal blinked annoyance at Francis, though he kept his face neutral and blank, only smoothing the pleat on his plaid slacks.

"That's kind of you Francis. I encourage you to remember however that The Devil is a god in his own right, though most do not understand the extent of his bloody domain. A god doesn't need yet another dog to grovel at his feet. The Devil has all the minions and worshippers he could ever need and a few more besides that. Hades was lord of the underworld, held in eternal darkness, Lucifer was the bringer of light. Did that make him Persephone? If he who would bring the sun to hell, also carried a blade and razor sharp teeth? Perhaps we should all prepare for spring rain.... For the only thing the Devil wants, is to be seen truly, a task no mortal eyes could ever hope to survive. The only thing the Devil needs is Death... And Death is coming Francis, have no doubt about that."

CRUELTY HAS A HUMAN HEART
AND JEALOUSY A HUMAN FACE
TERROR THE HUMAN FORM DIVINE
AND SECRECY THE HUMAN DRESS
TERROR THE HUMAN FORM DIVINE

And Darkness Needed No Aid, For He Was The Universe

Chapter by Apocalyptic_Space_They

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.

The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars

Did wander darkling in the eternal space,

Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth

Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;

Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day,

And men forgot their passions in the dread

Of this their desolation; and all hearts

Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light

- Darkness, Lord Byron

❤️

Hannibal had a choice to make with the next person he elevated into something more elegantly meaningful then they'd been in life. Historically he'd always kept his murderer and murdered creations separate, creation and destruction, birth and death, equally divine, equally cursed, eternally balanced.

His needs were however changing... The Tooth Fairy was changing him, or at least offering him change, and The Tooth Fairy worshipped at the altar of the moon. Artemis, Goddess of the hunt, birth, and death, the cycle of life and death. He named his monsters and in so doing remade them, destroyed them, creation and destruction woven together into something sacred.... Not two things balanced but one thing defined by both aspects in balance.

Hannibal was fascinated, intoxicated by such a miniscule yet vast difference, one turn of the wrist or quirk of the mouth between angel and demon, hope and hate, hurt and healing.

Blades made out of Damascus steel were as beautiful as they were practical. The superior edge was made by folding two separate alloys in on themselves over and over, until the layers were so interwoven they balanced and braced each other. Blades made in this way were both stronger and sharper then blades made with either of the original alloys would've been. Every living thing had its own personal equilibrium. Though it hadn't been his way, he could understand and appreciate The Tooth Fairy's homage to this wholeness of being.

Such a mercilessly poetic creature, The Toothfairy, holding in his blood soaked hands, the balance of a gift freely given and a punishment righteously meted out, grace and savagery in one.

It gave Hannibal so many new paradigms to think about. In honor of The Tooth Fairy's offering, he was going to reciprocate with a most rare and precious gift, something sublimely new that reflected both of them.

He was going to give him the destruction of one of his own creations.

Like flowers that bloom every spring and then wither under the summer sun. Sometimes the inherent transience of something was an important part of what made the experience of it's loveliness so awe inspiring.

Hannibal was going to give The Tooth Fairy the death of Elliot Buddish.

Mr Buddish was a man who'd carried a dark and violent secret for years, one he'd no longer been able to hide, with a tumor growing deep in his brain.

The cancer diagnosis didn't change Buddish in any fundamental way. He'd always been a cruel, bitter, angry man. That malignance of personality had always been held just under the skin... and because Elliot believed himself to be a good man, that frightened him more then death itself. He was certain that he was becoming a man who would not get into heaven. Whatever he imagined heaven to be, Mr Buddish needed to believe himself a good man who belonged in heaven, on the side of the angels more than anything else... and so his darkest impulses took shape as The Angel Maker. A vigilante for the Lord... Though he'd never bothered to ask his Lord if he wanted or needed the help.

Elliot Buddish was so obsessed with being worthy of his heaven within a very narrow brand of american christian justice, he remade his violent impulses in their image, turned away from the loving support of his family to fulfill a more grandiose heroic image of himself. Hubris had been the downfall of many a man, Buddish wasn't new or unique in succumbing to the sin of pride.

Though the mechanism of Elliot's fixation was only broadly interesting to Hannibal. That damning pride had been such a simple lathe with which to reform him. Like Persephone, Hannibal was much to ravenous to resist the juicy blood red charm of that particular seed.

Elliot knew he was dying when he came to Hannibal for help. His marriage was over, he was going to die alone. Still he wanted to prove his ex-wife, and his own self loathing wrong. He wanted to die a very particular sort of honorable man. The fates, in all their wisdom lead Elliot Buddish to the offices of Dr Hannibal Lecter to be the guiding hand in bringing his fate

into fruition. How could Hannibal deny fate their holy pleasures? How could he not guide The Angel Maker's blade?

Of course Hannibal agreed to help Elliot realize his divine vision, to guide him in remaking these human predators into an expression of his desire for holy redemption, in hopes of also elevating his own monstrous self image into something angelic.

The Tooth Fairy's brutal justice wouldn't be the ascension Elliot was expecting... but it was the only one he was going to get. The god that Elliot Buddish prayed to didn't concern himself with the suffering of his charges.

The seedy beige motel wasn't exactly the canvas Hannibal would prefer working with, but it's where Elliot Buddish brought the three monsters Hannibal named for him during their last session. If he'd had an opportunity Hannibal might've suggested someplace a bit more in line with The Tooth Fairy's wild inclinations. This was far from ideal, but he'd worked under much worse conditions than these, he'd make do.

Over all he was pleased with how his Angel Maker's deadly earnest need fit his conversation with The Toothfairy. He was eager to make him something new. Being understood made his blood lust burn like a brand at the back of his skull. Fire, fury, lust, desire, hope, all swirled in the dark juicy core of his heart, a new creature born with no understanding of the world, peering out into the fog.

Hannibal stood lightly on the balls of his feet. The sticky creak of his murder suit gave him a sharp pavlovian thrill as he knocked on the door. He did love to ring the dinner bell.

Skreeeeeeeck

.

.

.

Knock Knock Knock

A rustling sound inside the the motel room, was followed by a dull thud and a weak moan. Elliot leaned against the other side of the door, only just now thinking to click the heavy deadbolt closed.

"Who is it?! I don't want any... I don't need anything thanks. You can go"

Hannibal ran his palms over the clear vinyl covering his chest, appreciating how unnaturally smooth it was under his hands.

"Mr Buddish, it's Doctor Lecter. You called me earlier. I'm here to help you prepare for your remaking. Do you remember?"

There was a strained silence, Hannibal could hear Elliot fiddling with the chain on the door as he deliberated.

"You really want to help me Doctor?"

"It is my job to help you achieve your goals Mr Buddish. I assure you, it's my honor to assist your ascension to a state of divinity. What happens to you next is quite important to me as well, perhaps I too might find something sacred and true here tonight..."

Sincerity could do wonders sometimes, that Elliot didn't have the context to really know what Hannibal meant was irrelevant. He heard the truth so he listened, deliberated only briefly before he opened the door.

"Yeah, ok Doctor"

Elliot Buddish only opened the door narrowly, standing stiff behind it like a teenager caught with stolen alcohol. He shifted back and forth, foot to foot in a state of nervous excitement. If he noticed the strangeness of Hannibal's attire, he didn't remark on it. Elliot's three victims, two men and one woman, each with their own cruel secret, were laid out neatly on the floor, not unlike a viking funeral.

Perhaps in a way it was exactly that. Hannibal could see himself shoulder to shoulder with The Tooth Fairy in the shadows. Two sacred warriors covered in the blood of their enemies, slashing away at the darkness humanity tried to drown them in.

If you will not let me live freely, I will find a way just to spite you

Taking everything in at a glance, Hannibal could see Elliot's as of yet unmade angels breathing slowly, the weak pulse of their hearts beating in their throats, the scent of their heavily drugged respirations. All three perfectly ready to become something greater then themselves.

For Elliot Buddish this was a morality play, a righteous act from a righteous man. There was a specific way to ease him into his role in Hannibal's message of cosmic reckoning....the offer of hidden devotions made painfully personally real. He wasn't smoothing over the rough edges of Elliot's rebirth out of kindness, his message to The Toothfairy was much to important to risk any unintended marks on his canvas. Every single cut, every single blow must be made with concise intention to ensure it's proper reception. Elliot hadn't earned any of Hannibal's enthusiastic reverence, he was merely the paper, this bloody love letter would be written on. The offering in the end, was himself, vicious and sincere, Hannibal Lecter in all his dangerous fullness.

It was important he not fluster Elliot to the point of being rash, he needed to feel in control right now, so even though Hannibal knew the answer, he asked anyway...

"Are they still alive Mr Buddish?"

"Ahhh I y-yes."

"Good, good. That's fantastic, you've done very good Elliot. Now are you absolutely certain this is what you need?"

"Uhh yes-s-s, it's the only way Doctor. I was called. God called me to speak the name of vengeance. I'll only be allowed into heaven if I can pay the toll. The eternal souls of these demon's will pay my way. I can see the taint of their evil on their souls Doctor, burning and burning behind their eyes"

"Ok, If that is your heart's desire then so it shall be. You'll be remade into the personification of holy vengeance Elliot. I wonder though, how do my eyes look to your god?"

"You're the archangel Raphael made flesh, Doctor. My divine healer incarnate. I see you standing before the throne of God healing my heart, leading me to my rightful place as the living blade of vengeance."

"Hmm? Raphael? Quite, quite... Well one musn't ignore the call of our gods to wield his blade, that's certainly true. Your hands are shaking Mr Buddish. Let me give you a sedative, to help steady your ailing soul"

"No thank you Doctor Lecter. I want to feel God's glory, every second of it"

Hannibal nodded in acknowledgement as he settled Elliot Buddish on the bed, in such a way as to present a perfectly framed portrait when the FBI (or Freddie Lounds) walked in the door.

"Very well then. Please sit here with your blade, yes, on the edge of the bed. There we go, good job Elliot. Are you ready for your first Angel?"

"Yes Doctor I'm ready"

Tears streamed down Elliot's face. Hannibal looked sideways at the man, thoughtful.

"Did you need one more session before we begin Mr Buddish?"

Elliot shook his head, wiping his nose crudely with his sleeve.

"No Doctor, I'm just so happy you're here to help me get into heaven"

"I see, creation can be an ecstatic process, if you feel the need to cry... or anything else, I promise I'll not judge you at any point. Ushering you into your after life is a gift I take quite seriously. Do you remember what I told you about William Blake and his angels?"

Elliot wiped his eyes, answering with an earnestness that was internally slightly amusing to Hannibal.

Yes Doctor I remember."

Hannibal maintained his bland professional expression, blinking away the smirk that threatened to ghost over his lips as Elliot continued in rapturous ecstacy.

"-The sacred heart is the depiction of Jesus's divine love... William Blake wrote about God's love for all his creation extensively. He believed that as a devout man of God, he must love all of God's creations passionately, even those that seemed to monstrous or-, ... He often

painted angels praying over the perfect mortal shell of Jesus the Lamb of God. I will be remade from the lion of God, to the Lamb, his burning sacred heart"

Hannibal nodded like Elliot was any other student who'd memorized his lesson in a satisfactory manner.

"Just so, William Blake believed all love was a godly love, all god's creations must be loved, even the masculine ones, even the dangerous ones. In his work Jesus often represented the tormented divinity of his love for men both great and terrible. In his paintings of Jesus, the Lamb is paralleled with the depictions of Mary and her immaculate heart, both were meant to be examples of a perfect, self sacrificing, deeply spiritual, divine love that was considered more sacred and desirable then even the holy pact of mortal marriage... likewise Judith represented both mother love and righteous vengeance. Judith was the stepping stone between Artemis and the holy mother Mary. Artemis was the goddess of birth, death, and that which gives chase in the night. Mary gave the world her suffering perfect love, always mourning, always meant to give life and then to lose everything that defined her. This has no meaning for you yet, but it soon will Elliot...and that moment of true enlightenment will hopefully be glorious enough to satiate even the most vengeful blood thirsty deities"

Elliot said nothing in response, that was fine Hannibal hasn't expected any. It was ideal for Mr Buddish to be so honored by the transfiguration into a bloody display of divine devotion that it rendered him speechless. Elliot's god didn't need him to speak, and Hannibal only needed Elliot to bleed his angels, then his blood would in turn be added to his supplication.

Hannibal Lecter clasped his hands together, the perfect image of an urbane patient professor waiting on his students. He prodded Elliot gently.

"Shall we begin then Mr Buddish?"

"Oh yes please"

Hannibal was perhaps the perfect mentor to have if one was quickly learning the savage delicate art of meaningful mass slaughter. Whether it was his skill as a teacher or some as of yet unexpressed inherent skill of Elliot Buddish, the multiple murder lesson went quite smoothly. There was very little talking between them once they started, only the natural ebb and flow of human ecstacy and suffering.

Each one of the future angels were settled carefully next to Elliot. Hannibal arranged their loose limbed heavily sedated bodies across the bed so that their heads were nestled in his lap, a solemn dedication. Though they were still quite unconscious, Elliot told each of his angels about his vision of god and his plan for a righteous balancing of the scales so that he might personally pass through the pearly gates.

After his explanation, Elliot covered their eyes and cut each one of their throats in a jagged sawing motion. Their blood poured unevenly out of them in seeping gouts, soaking Elliot to the bone and dousing the bed in ever increasing amounts of arterial blood. The slash of crimson running down the side of the oversized motel comforter reminded Hannibal of bloody teeth in a scowling, down turned mouth.

The mouth of his own god furiously swallowing his offerings whole.

The Toothfairy

Elliot's blade was much to dull for the work making his cuts messy and jagged. His bedside manner was also severely lacking. Hannibal supposed it wasn't fair to hold the man to a doctor's standard of care... still it rankled. Taking someone's death in your hands was a serious business, an art form to be savored. Ushering someone to their final living agonizing breath was a decadent extravagant souffle, not a triple pepperoni hot pocket.

Thankfully cutting all three of the angel's throats was quick work even for a relative novice. And then it was time for Elliot himself to be remade. Hannibal bid Elliot stand up and then sat in the still warm spot Elliot was just sitting in. It was the only place on this side of the bed that wasn't drenched in blood, and that was important.

Hannibal's rendition of ***Judith Beheading Holofernes***, was based on the etching by Cornelis Galle for it's sense of callous gleeful voyeurism and the blatant homoeroticism of Holofernes.

There would be a large missing piece though, Hannibal was going to leave his Judith out of the tableau. The Toothfairy was his Artemis, his Judith, his divine reckoning made flesh and blood, and in order to represent him, Hannibal needed to know him better, needed to be able to *see* him.

And so where he should be, there would only be a negative imprint, a bloody silhouette. Settling carefully into the dry spot on the bed, Hannibal hummed in quiet satisfaction at the sticky creaking of his kill suit as he moved.

Elliot, was still standing before him, shuffling eagerly along the leading edge of the puddle of bloody cast off seeping into the dirty grey beige carpet. Hannibal tipped his head slightly as if in thought.

"Elliot, should you not leave this world in the same state you entered it?"

"Doctor?"

"Might you go naked, trembling, and bloody into the into the void, in the same way William Blake envisioned the Lamb being transfigured?"

"Oh yes, Doctor. Thank you. I shouldn't offend my lord with attachment to worldly goods. He might not elevate me if he thinks I'm greedy"

"My exact concern Mr Buddish"

Elliot nodded along emphatically as he stripped out of his bloody clothes. Each article of blood drenched clothing hit the stiff motel carpet with a nearly obscene wet splut.

Wearing only the deep ruby red arterial blood of his victims, Eliot stood before Hannibal in a state of pleased demure satisfaction. Hannibal wondered if The Tooth Fairy had been shy the first few times he killed a man with a plan in mind, if he'd harbored any hesitance. He

beckoned Elliot to him gently, with a reverence for the message that the man himself didn't merit.

"Come here Elliot, let me relieve you of your burden"

"Ok, Doctor. Thank you, I don't think I could have done this part on my own no matter how determined I might have been."

Elliot shuffled through the blooming bloodstain seeping into the threadbare carpet and crawled around the end of the bed across the blood soaked comforter, circling like a cat to lay his head in Hannibal's creaking vinyl covered lap. He looked up with earnest eyes, speaking in a shivering whisper.

"Do you think it's enough Doctor? Do you think God will give me my rightful place in heaven now?"

Hannibal gently brushed Elliot's hair out of his eyes, imagining it was the Toothfairy with his jagged monstrous teeth instead. He hummed a pleasing little song as he soothed Elliot in the Toothfairy's place. Slowly so as not to alarm Mr. Buddish Hannibal wove his fingers firmly into Elliot's hair and picked up his own diamond sharp blade.

"I'm afraid I don't know Elliot, your god is a mercurial disapproving kind of god. I fear nothing could ever be enough, he blesses and curses equally, for no reason other then whim and whimsy. But my god will almost certainly be pleased"

Elliot's eyes were comically large and confused when he rolled slightly in Hannibal's lap.

"Your God Doctor?"

"Yes Mr Buddish, my God will relish your remaking. Do you remember what I told you about Judith, Jesus, Mary, and Artemis, Elliot? ... I'm afraid I left one name out. Tonight you're not Jesus, sacrificial lamb, you're Holofernes brought down by your own painful hubris. There is vengeance here but it isn't yours I'm afraid. I'm Judith's blade, as Artemis wills it, as my god in particular enjoys the punishment of the cruel and abusive. You were an unkind man in life weren't you Elliot? You came to me because you wished to become something better than you were, something divine, and so you will be remade in his divinity... and his divinity alone"

Elliot tried to jerkily break free but Hannibal had him much to firmly restrained. He could only thrash uselessly as he tried to avoid the inevitability of The Chesapeake Ripper's blade. If there was a man alive who could dodge the Ripper's murderous intent, it was not The Angel Maker, Elliot Buddish.

Hannibal's scalpel made quick work of Elliot, a smooth precise line like a smile from ear to ear. Elliot's indignant thrashing made blood race out of his body, a thunderous spring rain as it splashed across the vinyl kill suit and slid with brisk efficiency to the ground between his feet.

Relishing the sacred feeling of this collaborative creation, Hannibal sat in the silence memorizing every sensation before he finished setting up his tableau, the shiny paper wrapping on his gift to The Toothfairy, whomever and wherever he might be.

Somewhere in the dead of night, Will Graham tossed and turned, restless in sleep. A single crash of thunder rolled across the night sky, warning of abrupt spring storms coming. Will settled into a deeper vivid bloody dream, smiling under the light of the waxing moon.

In his dreams Will was running, chasing shadows cloaked in blood and whispered promise.

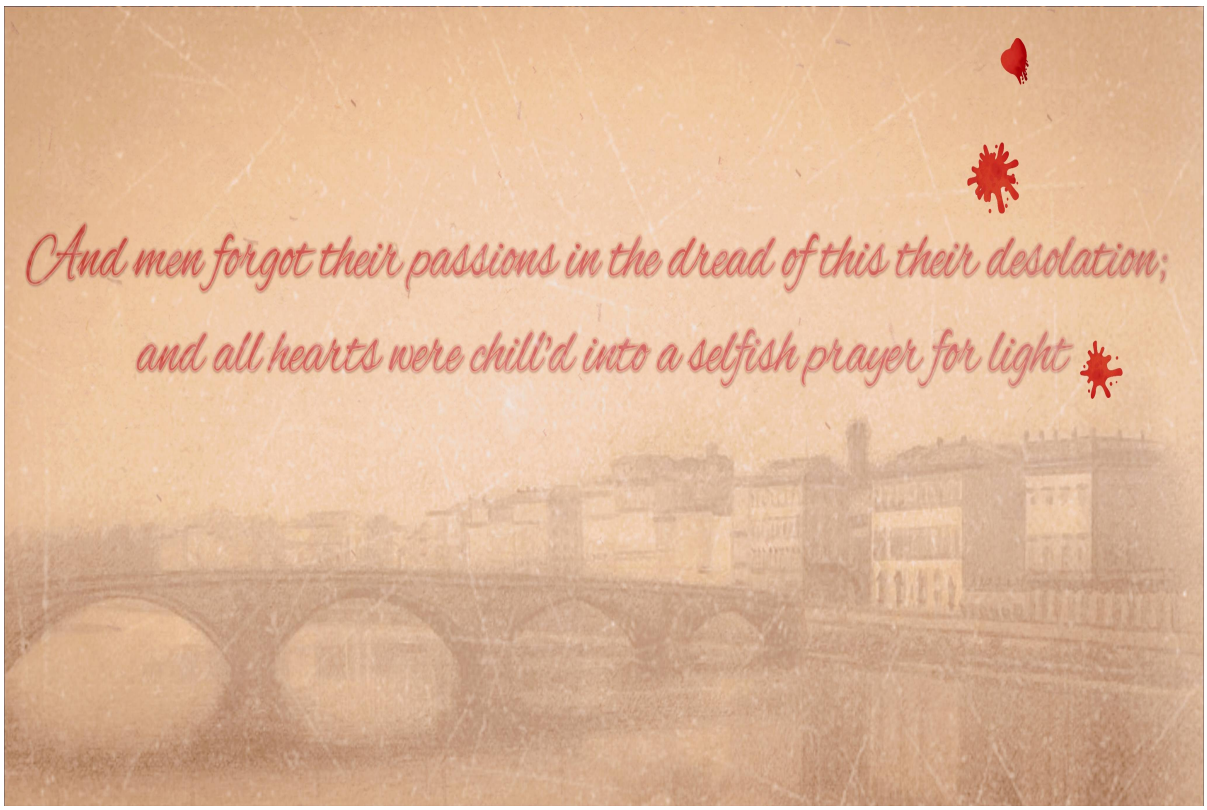
Sanguine vicious promises that felt like home.

In his dreams, Will spun his blades under the shimmering moonlight, bent low to the ground and ran faster, loping in long dangerous strides

The Ravenstag stood watch over his master as he ran, waiting for dawn to come.

It was almost time

❤️


And men forgot their passions in the dread of this their desolation;
and all hearts were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light

Will held his breath outside the hotel room door that was the only physical barrier between himself and The Chesapeake Ripper's message. He wanted to rip the door open, lay down in

the carnage, and rub the thick coagulating blood into his skin, holy benediction... of course he couldn't do that, but the impulse beat a demanding erratic rhythm in the back of his mind.

Jack was as usual admonishing him like he was a child.

"You need to prepare yourself Will, this one, it's pretty bloody and brutal in there. There's four corpses. They've all been carefully arranged but it's not pristine in there. If this was The Chesapeake Ripper, it represents a significant escalation, we can't take anything for granted"

Will scowled heavily at the door keeping him from everything he ever wanted.

"I get it Jack. You know I hate how crime scenes make me feel. How about you quit preaching and let me get the hell on with it?"

Jack tipped his head, lips pursed in reticent agreement.

"Ok Will, just be prepared."

"I'm prepared Jack. What the fuck?!"

Bracing himself, Will closed his eyes and opened the door.

He wasn't prepared.

He couldn't possibly be prepared

It was stunning, he was awestruck

He never could've been fully prepared for this heavenly gift

There was no doubt about it, this was a gift, he knew it in his bones

Will stepped into the room, as if he was stepping into the painting, or he thought probably the etching actually, he'd double check later. The consumptive homoerotic voyeurism in the scene implied the Galle etching.

Elliot Buddish was displayed with an overt voyeuristic violent delight. He was clearly naked and mostly bare, body twisted by unseen forces, his so called modesty barely covered by a twist of sheet. The other three bodies were posed superficially like angels, cherubs really if it was Galle. They were feigning the modesty of prayer, looking down on Elliot with wide eyed hunger. There was blood everywhere, oceans of it.

Will was overcome, his body shook, desperate for some relief, release. He stumbled back, allowed his legs to give out so he slid down the door jam. He needed to look up into the greedy eyes of their cherub audience. He needed to see what The Chesapeake Ripper envisioned in his mind.

Jack hovered over Will, looking deeply concerned.

"Will, if this is to much-"

"No... I can. I can do this. You need me to right? Just, just get everyone out...and get someone to bring me some plastic sheeting. There's so much blood. You're right, this is different. If you want an accurate read, I need time to see what The Ripper saw... with no looky loos making faces at me. I can feel it when they're gawking Jack"

"Ok, you got it, no gawkers. Just give us a few minutes ok? It's just... Yell if you need me. I'll be right outside."

Will didn't respond, and Jack didn't wait to see if he would, stepping out of the hotel room and closing the door behind him to bark orders at his team without disturbing Will when he was feeling *delicate*.

Now the door that had been keeping him from The Ripper's world, cradled him in it instead. The care in the scene was gentle but firm, like a hand at the nape of his neck. Will could almost feel The Ripper's knowledgeable fingers digging into the meaty tender vulnerable place under the line of his jaw, the pressure point where his ear met his neck.

His body buzzed happily

Will knew he was disassociating to much, this warm fuzzy, vaguely erotic, nonverbal haze... was not a state he should be in with ten million feds outside... but this gift, it wasn't just plucking at his true nature, it was designed to tear away all the stitching on his mask, to rip him forcefully out of his person suit and leave him open, trembling, begging for more.. and it worked.

It worked.

He was desperate for more.

In the river of his mind, Will could feel The Ripper casually pinning his hands behind his back, choking him slowly with the easy decisive energy of a surgeon in his element. His hot breath whispered across Will's collar bone as he flashed his scalpel in the dark, digging into his most tender places, cutting away all of the trappings of normalcy Will hid behind.

Show Me Everything

In his memory palace The Ripper chuckled, quiet and deadly, his teeth grazed the vulnerable thrumming artery in Will's throat.

Shall I eat you or keep you Will? Perhaps if you beg I'll let you put those divine monstrous teeth on me... perhaps if you're very good, I'll let you make me bleed

"Oh god"

Heavy with arousal Will's stomach clenched. His eyes flew open when he realized he'd said that out loud when he had no real idea if he was still alone. There was a clear plastic painting drop cloth, still in its packaging resting politely by his left knee. A wet, desperately horny laugh escaped the cage of his chest.

Jack, not wanting to disturb his fragile but gifted profiler had discreetly left it for Will to find when he came to again.

Just as well really, God had nothing to do with this.

Will's hands shook as he tore open the packaging. The Ripper in the ocean of his mind was still whispering sharp, dangerous promises,

Let me worship at the well of your design Tooth Fairy. I could give you everything

Once he was sure his request for privacy would be honored, and the plastic was finally unfolded, he was better able to take the details of The Ripper's gift in.

Will spread the cloth out on the floor under him like a mobster in a movie and shuffle crawled into in the middle of the massive pool of blood.

There was so much blood, probably close to six gallons, and it was only separated from him by a thin layer of plastic. The blood pressed cool and soupy against his skin on the other side of the plastic. There was a sensual intimacy to the concrete realness of The Ripper's offering... of the soaking wet, sticky, life blood of four people so close, yet so terribly out of reach. A cool devastating numbness that made Will's breath ragged and whiney in his throat.

There was a bloodless outline on the bed where Judith was supposed to be standing, that's where The Ripper sat while he bled Elliot Buddish out.

"Fuck"

The shadowy phantom of The Ripper loomed over Will, occupying the space in his mind that the real man had been only a few hours before. The Ripper's predator eyes never left Will's face as he caressed Elliot's brow, where he lay in The Ripper's lap. He smiled down at Will with guarded affection

This could all be for you Will, all for you

The Ripper moved fast as lighting, as his scalpel opened Elliot's neck, blood splattered across Will's face, hot and wet. He licked the phantom blood off his lips, a needy sob broke through his rigid self control. The world spun around him like a kaleidoscope. He wasn't sure how long he sat kneeling at the feet of his phantom Ripper before he slithered up on the bed and took the place he'd been so thoughtfully reserved. The place The Chesapeake Ripper was making just for him, purposefully.

Oh that...

Something colorful caught his attention across from him on the little side table. Will felt disconnected from his body, head and human shaped shell two separate discreet parts bobbling along, as he wobbled across the room on jello weak legs.

It was a note written in blood on expensive paper, with a sketch of a peaceful looking... probably European bridge, and a flyer for a Botticelli showing at a local art museum.

The note was a quote from a Lord Byron poem called Darkness. He knew it well. It'd been one of his favorite during his obligatory teenage goth phase. It was about, among other things, sensual violence, impossible to satiate hunger, depression, the need for human connection, art, and the loss of hope...

The flyer was... was he being asked on a date? Was he ready to meet The Chesapeake Ripper? He wasn't sure.

Will was still shaking with emotion when he opened the door and called Jack back in. He stood vacant and distracted in the middle of the room as Jack waited for Will to be ready to talk, his eyes sliding with tense interest over everything in the room, no doubt mentally cataloguing all the horrific to him details. Eventually he was done with that. He waved broadly at Will and the display around the bed.

"Well?"

Licking his lips, feigning a scowl, Will looked sideways at his gift. If he looked directly Jack might see the chasm of his longing.

"He's sick of the audience Jack... thinks we're hypocritical... getting off on the spectacle, enjoying their pain. I think... he wants them to meet... so he doesn't have to... share... The Tooth fairy... With uh... anyone, anymore. So he can show the Tooth Fairy his true face"

Jack turned in a slow circle, gesturing to all the carnage.

"And how the hell does he think The Toothfairy will get his invitation?"

That shook Will out of his haze for a second... how was that supposed to happen for someone not involved with the FBI?

Freddie Lounds

"I don't know but I'd bet a solid twenty bucks that something will get leaked to Tattle Crime again"

Will was both overly aware of everything and at the same time not entirely cognizant of it. Jack was asking him something. He tried to shake the horny violent detachment off again.

"Jack I-, wai-, what?"

"Are you ok Doctor Graham? I said, do you think the Toothfairy will be interested in meeting in person?"

****YES****

"How the fuck could I know that Jack? I'm not on that case"

"Well not for lack of trying"

~~**Careful Will**~~

"This shit is exactly why I don't sit up and beg Every time you snap your fingers Jack. I don't have a professional opinion about whether or not The Toothfairy would be interested in that."

"Ok humor me though, what's your unprofessional opinion then Doctor Graham"

"My unprofessional opinion is that you should talk to the guy you're paying specifically to have a professional opinion about it"

"Yeah yeah ok, so whet else?"

"He's lonely Jack, incredibly lonely. He might even be suicidal. I don't have to impress on you the necessity of being very careful and cautious with this one right?"

"I'm always careful, this is my job Will"

"No, I know you are, but more then that. This is...ok, hear me out. If you could-, if Bella was across the room from you, and all you had to do to save her life was walk over to her, would you?"

Jack scowled at him like he was being more stupid than usual as Will continued explaining.

"Of course you would, right? Anyone would. Ok so what if she was on the opposite end of your department, but you had to kill the Chesapeake Ripper to get to her? She'd be 100% cured if you did Jack, instantly, and no one would ever know. Would you do it?"

Jack clenched his jaw in increased agitation with this thought exercise.

"I know what I'm supposed to say, I also know what I want to say. You made your point ok-."

"No, I'm just starting my point. That was a yes, so what if it was two serial killers? Three? Four? An infinity of them? What would you give to save the love of your life from certain death?"

Jack sneered a little, jaw tight with imagined anger, more at himself then Will

"Anything.... I'd do anything."

"And if you were a monster yourself? If you never believed that was something you could have? If the world had only ever wanted you dead anyway? What would you do to save Bella then? If you'd found her and something that felt an awful lot like love? What would you do to save her then?"

Jack was looking at the small lake of blood in the room in cold dawning horror as he answered.

"I'd burn the world to the gawdamn ground if It meant Bella lived. The world without her? It's... not worth considering."

"Yeah exactly. So be extra careful Jack, you're annoying as hell but I don't want you dead. Bella would kick my ass"

❤️

It was late when Freddie finally got home, the night of the quadruple homicide that'd been dubbed The Angel Maker murders. It was always a late night when there was a particularly sensational serial murder.

But today has been particularly long, she'd gotten an anonymous tip at dawn. An email that claimed The Chesapeake Ripper sent The Toothfairy a very bloody belated Valentine.

Well of course she had to try and get there before the police did.

And wow what a valentine it was, she could see that. Something was brewing between those two and if Freddie Lounds had anything to do with it, hers would be the by line every single one of the true crime girlies would be clamoring for. She was going to get a fucking Pulitzer.

Because yes she was smart, quick, the best of the best.. but she also knew when she should do what... and she had a secret weapon... well two actually. The Chesapeake Ripper and The Toothfairy were both leaking her information anonymously. It didn't matter that it was anonymous, she might not know the names their mother's gave them, but she knew who they were. No one else could know the things they knew, when they knew them.

It was definitely really them.

That they had both individually decided she was the solution to their problem was kind of great.

They were funny compliments to each other, if it was a TV show she'd be insanely invested in getting these two weirdos together. Her absolute favorite murder Husbands

Sadly she couldn't talk about this in a group chat, but she was enjoying it anyway.

The Chesapeake Ripper was obviously well educated, he talked like Oscar Wilde fucking Carl Jung on a stack of leather bound academic tomes. He was generous with sincere albeit manipulative compliments.

The Toothfairy on the other hand was direct and taciturn. He was... earthy. Something about his turn of phrase implied he was educated but not snobby about it, put her in mind of small town fire and brimstone preachers, the sort of backwoods country boys who always ended up on the news for "accidentally" shooting a friend during hunting season, the sort of small town alterna kid who got bullied in highschool because he was to well read, to smart for his peers comfort, to weird and proud to hide it.

The Toothfairy openly resented having to talk to her, resented having to be polite, resented that he saw her work as good enough to be worth putting up with her. Every single nice thing he'd ever said was incredibly sincere... and apparently sheer torture for him, judging by the intensity of his distaste at having said anything nice at all.

If she was being totally honest... she kinda liked him. He was funny. He had the sort of bitchy sense of humor that the small town queens she grew up with had.

Flattery will get you everywhere Mr Toothfairy

But it didn't matter if she liked them, because they were going to get her Pulitzer. She opened her email and read what they'd both sent her about the Botticelli exhibit gala this weekend.

It was fascinating how in sync they were without ever speaking face to face. If there was such thing as soulmates, in the old school mythology sense. These guys might be the real deal.

She could practically taste the bubbly champagne flavor of that Pulitzer

When she was done sorting through all her pictures of the crime scene she started her article

LIKE BLOOD AND CHOCOLATE, TRUE LOVE, TRUE CRIME, AND THE LATE GREAT BOTTICELLI

A comforter stained the color of a three day old bruise and a blood soaked carpet was all that was left of the savage declaration of devotion that happened here just hours earlier.

In the midst of all this bloody brutality a lone pristine flyer for an art show, given pride of place on a table in the direct eyeline of the star of the show. One of the few things in the room completely unsullied by blood.

There is a fundraising gala this weekend at that very museum centering around that very same collection. Are monsters going on dates these days? Will they have a spring wedding? Next year will we be hiding from the dual blades of these terrifying Murder Husbands?

I don't know readers but at this rate? We might all be dying to find out

--

Will yanked his bleeping phone off the charger.

"What Jack? I'm in bed, somehow I don't think The Ripper has already killed again"

"What? No, No, this is about something else. Have your read Freddie's article about the Angel Maker scene?"

"No? Not yet. I'm trying to sleep"

"She claims to have sources that are *confirming* that The Ripper and The Toothfairy are planning on meeting up at the art Museum Gala this weekend"

"Oh yeah? Fancy. Sounds like something the FBI will love attending."

"You're coming too"

"Jack-,"

"Huh uh there will be no Jaaaacks. There's to much attention on these two and you know it. We need them caught, yesterday. So you're going to put on a suit and attend this thing. Then you're going to compare notes with The Toothfairy profiler, and you're going to be fucking civil Will. We need to put a stop to this now"

Will scowled into the dark of his bedroom

"Fine Jack, you can make me go. You can't make me like it"

"*Doctor Graham* I don't care if it makes you want to chew your own arm off, as long as you do your job"

"Yeah yeah yeah. Do your Job Will. Do your job. What about you? When are you gonna start doing your job instead of harassing me?"

Will didn't bother to say anything else. Tossing his phone aside, he lay sprawled out, still trying to sleep.

The shadow version of The Ripper that lived in Will's head, loomed over him in the dark, growling with dark intent from the place he knelt between Will's legs. This version of the ripper was made of night, his eyes were the color of the blood moon low in the sky. He had antlers or wings, Will could never quite see him clearly enough to be sure... maybe it was both. The Ripper was Will's own personal nightmare paralysis demon... Only he didn't try to crush him... Not exactly anyway.

The Ripper phantasm captured Will's bare thighs in his razor sharp taloned hands, pulling him closer, pressing bruises into his tender flesh, the Ripper in Will's mind, growled deep in his monster chest

"You shouldn't be so angry. Don't you want to know me the way I know you Will?"

"Of course I do. There's going to be cops there though."

The Ripper ran one teasing talon just under the waistband of Will's boxers

"There was always going to be police in this, you're police"

"I am not"

The ripper stared sideways at Will like a rooster watching a worm squirm in the dirt

"And is fighting part of the fantasy for you my sweet Tooth Fairy?"

Will choked on his own hot wet laughter

"... Maybe... Yeah... Maybe. Mm just tired of being....fake nice... all the fucking time. I'm tired, aren't you fucking tired?"

The Phantom Ripper pressed his thumbs with bruising insistence into the hollows of Will's hip bones

"Tired? Your frustration is beautiful, savage... and do you think about killing me in your frustration, Toothfairy?"

"...yes, all the time..."

"How do you think of killing me?"

Want rolled over Will hot and heavy in his stomach, his were hips desperately hungry to rut on someone who wasn't even really there. It made it difficult to focus, to form words into coherent sentences.

"I want it... with my hands... with my... kill teeth... soak myself with your blood"

"What does it feel like to kill me Will?"

"It's... intimate... Beautiful... revelation"

In the dark of his bedroom, Will writhed sweaty and desperate for a release that may never come, The Phantasm Ripper smiled, showing all his sharp predator teeth, amused.

"Soon the whole world will bleed for us William, how does that make you feel?"

Will let his hands wander, needy and rough over his body.

"Alive"

The Walters Art Museum
The Divine Form of Botticelli, a reflection on the artist, his life, his art, & his mastery of the depiction of human nature in all it's divine savagery
March 3rd - June 25th

Chapter End Notes

This chapter got so out of hand, I had to split it.

I'm so sorry, chapter five tho... It's gonna have so much going on... including Hannibal & Will finally meeting

We'll see Tobias & Francis again too

A Treachery of Images

Chapter by Apocalyptic_Space_They

Jack stared balefully at the assortment of specialists that made up his team, then back at the art gallery layout, round and round. No magical solutions presented themselves. When he'd approached the Museum about the sting operation he'd assumed it would be easy to set up. Art Museums after all have extensive security. He should've known better. It turned out that museum security was focused on keeping the art from being damaged or removed to the exclusion of anything else. It wasn't at all suited to watching for suspicious acting serial murders lurking as inconspicuously out of sight as possible. There were multiple gaps in their security camera needs.

On top of that, the Botticelli collection was extremely prestigious and drew a generously affluent crowd. The art director wasn't going to put a crimp in the flow of donations by making their upper class guests uncomfortable with a visible police presence at their elite party.

What should've been a cake walk was quickly becoming a logistical nightmare.

He'd need a plain clothes team that could rub elbows with the extremely upper class art collecting crowd without offending them. That drastically limited the pool of agents he could pull from. Then there was his profiling team. He'd come so close to telling Doctor Graham to just forget about it entirely. That man gave him a headache even when they weren't elbow deep in art snobs and gossiping society wives. Unfortunately Jack needed his profilers there if they were going to spot these killers. He'd just have to hope that for once Will Graham would be agreeable and everything would go smoothly.

That wasn't what was going to happen but it's what he'd have to hope for.

Clearing his throat to get everyone's attention, Jack started the meeting.

It didn't have to be ideal, it had to be done.

"Ok, team so we're gonna have a small problem tonight. The museum won't let us have any uniformed agents at the gala. The place itself is a maze of-"

Will laughed, unimpressed and cynical as always.

"Did you expect anything else? And people call *me* rude. Jack, you practically accused them of murder. Of course they had all their pearls firmly in hand."

Will sat up straight in his office chair, affecting the prim avoidant body language and nasal drawl of a Louisiana debutante.

"Why Agent Crawford are you accusing one of the good people of this association of murder? Honey if I wanted a person dead, I would pay someone else to make it happen. This

manicure cost me more then you make in a month. I wouldn't lower myself to gut a fish, much less a person. It's grotesque. I refuse to even think of such things. I swear, the working man can be so crass."

With the exception Dr Lecter the room broke out in stifled giggles. Hannibal set a leather bound notebook down in front of him with precise care, long fingers quietly squaring the corners and then folding his hands neatly over it.

"It's true my peers are usually much to thoughtless and dull to be capable of anything The Toothfairy has ever done. However It would be a mistake to assume an income bracket could prevent a person from having murderous inclinations. We can't afford to over look anyone in our pursuit of such clever quarry"

Will stood up stiffly, intentionally looking past Dr Lecter, making pointed not quite eye contact with Jack.

"I don't appreciate my words being twisted. Of course the super rich can be and are harmful to the point of murder. I never said they weren't. My joke was based on the idea that rich people themselves pretend to be morally superior. But while we're on the topic, the only reason a one percenter would have for becoming a serial killer specifically, was if he wanted, no *needed* to kill his own people.... specifically his own people. He would be preying on his own pack, pissing in his own pool. Because if the super rich want to stomp on poor people, they just do it. They don't even think about it, they don't have to hide it or explain it. They can destroy the poor with impunity. It would be a mistake to assume that anyone in that tax bracket considers the working class human enough for killing us to be evil. Maybe a little gauche... but not evil"

Silence settled heavy and poisonous in the room.

Hannibal blinked slowly, conceding with a tightly controlled nod in Jack's direction.

"Doctor Graham's point is not without merit. The only thing we know about these men at this point is that they're most likely well educated, intelligent, organized killers who for their own reasons are curious about each other. I very much doubt that either one of them would show themselves if there was an increased presence of uniformed agents at the gala. So in the end it likely won't matter that the museum wouldn't allow it"

Will laughed, mean and tired.

"Yeah, me and Captain Plaid agree on that at least"

"I'm so glad we could come to this agreement Doctor. I'ill even refrain from any reciprocal scathing commentary about your denim and tweed ensemble. I find a challenge much more thrilling then anything so easily achieved, though I know that's not the case for everyone-"

Jimmy saved the day, lurching forward, slapping the table with a slightly frantic rush of energy.

"Oh! Speaking of easy. Hey uhh, Will, that was a good impression you did. Have you ever done any professional acting?"

Will rubbed his face, visibly calming himself before answering.

"No Jimmy I haven't ever done any professional acting. That's a skill born of echolalia and unadulterated hatred. I can't do it just cause someone thinks it's cute.... thank you though. I appreciate... the sentiment with which it was given... Anyway I need to feed my dogs, take em for a run before this kicks off. I'll be there."

Jack sighed internally.

"Will, just dress appropriately and be on your best behavior, please. We have to catch these guys"

"Sure Jack"

Will winked at the team sarcastically and peeled out of the room. Silence settled again.

Hannibal turned to Jack smooth as silk as if the last few minutes never happened, a small smile gracing the corner of his mouth.

"If this gala doesn't work out Agent Crawford. I could throw a dinner party for you. Everyone at the Gala tonight would die to get an invite to one of my famous dinner parties. As an olive branch, Doctor Graham could even be the guest of honor"

Thank all that was good and just in the universe for Hannibal Lecter, personal savior of the FBI and Jack Crawford in particular. At least he wouldn't have to worry about Hannibal causing any scandals or international incidents. Maybe he ought to shove Will at Doctor Lecter tonight... keep him busy with someone on the payroll? They could handle each other for the length of a sting right? Could he risk pissing off his two best profilers like that?

Fuck this was a logistical nightmare.

Jack paused his scrutiny of the museum map, leaning back to stretch the the tension out of his shoulders. Hmm the main gallery would be pretty well covered at least... The biggest problem would be all the hallways leading to the bathrooms and hidden employee exits tucked away intentionally out of sight. Jack sighed again, waving everyone back to work except Beverly.

"Detective Katz, are you bringing your girlfriend to the gallery? I know we decided it would be beneficial for our cover to pair up but... she could be a liability."

Beverly settled a little to casually beside Jack, raising an eyebrow.

"Geez, I don't know Jack, are you bringing your wife?"

"Now dammit, that's not-, Bella's been married to a cop for decades. She knows what goes on. Your girlfriend's very different, she's a liability"

Beverly stood up straighter at that, tapping the back of Jack's hand with her pen in mild eye rolling annoyance.

"Freddie Lounds has never been a liability to anyone in her life. She's brilliant. She's capable, she's gonna get a Pulitzer someday."

"But Beverly... please be reasonable, it's Tattle Crime Freddie Lounds. She's working against us"

"Is she Jack? Is she? ... *or* are you just annoyed that the bad guys figured out how to play that card too? You know the saying, make your woman happy or someone else will? We have that in common Jack. We love to make our women happy. This will make both of them happy so this is where both of them will be. If you need to, think of it as damage control. Freddie's gonna be there regardless, all the armed guards on earth couldn't keep her out. If she's there with us, we'll have more influence over the narrative she chooses."

Jack let the resignation wash over him. Clearly he needed to retire, because that actually sounded fifty two percent reasonable.

"Fine, but I officially think it's a bad idea. Moving on, I didn't want to get into this with Will. I only have the strength for one touchy subject at a time. But just in terms of people power and eyes on the ground. Alana is bringing her wife too right? What about umm Frederick... Do you know if he has a ... date?"

Bev laughed genuinely at Jack's bemused question.

"Alana's wife's name is Margot. You should probably remember it. Frederick, Brian, and Jimmy are coming together as *bros*"

Jack took an aborted breath, paused.

"Do I even want to know what's going on with those three?"

"You do not, nobody does, most especially them. Brian's in denial, Jimmy's practically planning a thrupple wedding and Frederick just pulls on those vests of his, eyes all bugged out like he's choking on it, funniest shit I've ever seen."

"Hmm that's gonna make my eyes bug out of my head too if I think on it to hard. Tell me Beverly, how is it that almost my entire team inhabits some place in the LGBTQIA+?"

"I don't know boss, You shouldn't ask questions you don't want answers for. We flock together... so probably the same reasons you and Bella both look at Idris Elba *and* Angela Bassett like that..."

"I have no idea what you're talking about. Idris Elba and Angela Bassett are both phenomenal actors"

"They sure are... phenomenally attractive too though right?"

"It would be a mistake for me to argue with you any more wouldn't it?"

"Very yes."

They both laughed at the casual teasing, the threat of tension dissipating.

Jack rubbed his chin, tired, overtaxed, mind already sliding back toward his logistics problems... If he put a man there... They'd have almost everything covered but one bathroom hallway with it's assorted employee exits and storage closets. He didn't love it but it'd have to do... as long as it didn't get really busy it should be ok.

Just how smart were The Chesapeake Ripper and The Toothfairy? Did they know his team would be there waiting? Would they even show up? Would they suspect they were being watched? He grumbled, releasing Bev with a distracted wave.

"HMmmh you're right about Margot. I'll do better. We both better get going. We have a lot to get in order before the show really starts"

"Sure thing boss man"

Jack grimaced at his logistical problem again, behind him he could hear Beverly on the phone with her girlfriend.

"Yeah Freds, he said yes, I told you he would. He's one of the last old school romantics. So break out your favorite cocktail gown baby. We're goin OUT"

Jack smiled fondly. Things must be getting serious between them if Beverly wanted Freddie to come to work functions. His team were in a lot of ways the closest he and Bella would ever come to having kids. He wanted to support them. Young love was beautiful. He wasn't embarrassed to be called a romantic, he was, always had been, even more so now.

He'd been thinking about it a lot since Bella got her diagnosis, since they knew for sure... He couldn't stop thinking about the way the Italian sun made her look like a goddess all those decades ago. This life, his Bella. The greatest gift he'd ever been given was this divine woman's heart. An accident of fate that shaped every moment of his life since, it hurt to imagine life without her again. He'd let Freddie be a minor nuisance for young love.

Everyone deserved to have their person

❤️

Beverly plucked at her silk blouse, checking the time, more nervous then she cared to admit. She was able to relax some once Jack got on board with her bringing Freddie. Still she knew that a lot of her coworkers didn't approve of their relationship. It didn't help that privately she shared some of their reservations. Hopefully if Freddie was here in an official capacity, it would pull double duty, directing her curiosity constructively and adding another set of extremely sharp eyes to their team. But really at the end of the day, she just wanted to take her girlfriend to a swanky party.

At first it hadn't mattered, their relationship was mutually beneficial, that was all.

Lately though? Lately it felt like it might be becoming more than that... now maybe it mattered.

Bev checked the time again. The gala opened it's doors fifteen minutes ago and the crowd was already sardined enough to make Jack rumble grump his near constant disapproval. Freddie got there after Hannibal but before anyone else. She was absolutely radiant in an emerald green dress that coordinated perfectly with her deep red hair and Beverly's more practical punky off the shoulder silk blouse, wide leather belt, palazzo pants, and sensible boots.

Freddie's cynical expression softened when their eyes met.

"Beverly, you clean up well, I'm impressed. You look *hot*"

"So do you, like a princess, princess hot. You look princess hot."

"Please, don't insult me Beverly Katz. I look like a queen. I'm queen hoy"

"Oof Your so right. You are a queen, a hot warrior queen even... I know I'm supposed to say something funny and flirty here, but I spend eighteen hours a day with Jimmy and Brian. I'm out of practice. Then there's this whole How To Catch a Killer thing we've got going on tonight. Half my brain is already freaking out about crowds and trace evidence. You really do look stunning though"

"Thank you, so do you. Practical is very sexy on you, but you can't distract me that easily"

"I can't?"

Freddie's fingers were cool and firm, floating magically over Bev's bicep.

"If you can, I'll never tell"

"Be careful Freddie Lounds, secrets make me want to find all the juicy truths, put em to the test. Come on, we're missing out on the world's most awkward thrupple trying to woo his lordship Count Dracula."

"Wait, Count Dracula is Doctor Lecter right? Who's the world's most awkward thrupple?"

Beverly just pointed at her cluster of coworkers. Jimmy and Frederick were both talking in an emphatic fashion at Hannibal while each one of them held one of Brian's arms in a near death grip. The former looked like they'd practiced this maneuver. The latter looked like he was praying for an earthquake or any other natural disaster to swallow him whole.

"Oh my god. How did that happen?"

"Right? I don't know but it had to involve booze. Speaking of, champagne? Almost all of our people are here.... Well except Will.. We're supposed to be blending in, so we're allowed, to a degree. According to The Mighty Jack Crawford, *as long as we don't over do* it"

Freddie let her hair fall over half her face like a veil.

"Will's that twitchy little professor that was at the hotel right?"

Beverly took Freddie's hand, winding through the already hopping crowd.

"You know it is babe"

"Oh, I can't wait to pick his brains"

Beverly just laughed

"Yeah well good luck with that, he doesn't like answering questions"

❤️

Freddie watched the investigative team with rapt fascination as they shifted and moved around each other. While she had a reputation as a hard ass who never stopped, sometimes the best route to the story was patience. She could be patient when patience was what was necessary.

Beverly was obviously well liked by her coworkers, it was one of the things that was most endearing about her girlfriend. She was painfully likeable. Freddie couldn't be that charming if her life depended on it... her job often did. She could be smooth but not ever lovely in the way Bev was.

Freddie'd come to terms with the fact that she was an off putting person ages ago... and yet this beautiful, brilliant, wonderful, lovely woman liked her? If she was the type to not believe in herself, she'd find it hard to believe.

Beverly and the rest of the CSI team were talking in an over serious hush, trying and utterly failing at looking casual. They had cop vibes, she was never going to find anything with them standing right beside her looking so officially federal.

Even so, Beverly was gorgeous, glowing among them. Freddie kinda didn't want to walk away from her... kinda... almost. Bev would get it though, they both had an unquenchable need to understand things.

She'd worry about her blooming soft fluffy Beverly Katz feelings tomorrow, tonight there was a story. The story was her first and foremost priority.

The two people she was most interested in interviewing for that story were the two most reticent profilers. Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham. Those two were like night and day, almost comically so.

Hannibal Lecter arrived at the exact moment he'd agreed to be there. He was practically floating on a cloud of pure polished sunshine here. People gave him room without thinking about it, without realizing they were doing it.

In his sharp plaid suit of rich jewel tone blues and greens, high society clustered around him in open adoration, he looked like an old world aristocrat holding court. Some of his audience she knew from her work. Alana and Margot Bloom-Verger, Agent Crawford and his stunning wife, Bella. There were also an assortment of people she didn't recognize. Maybe most notably, a tall surly white man who was broodily trying to capture Hannibal's attention and being repeatedly politely brushed off. She suppressed a snort of laughter and snapped some pictures so she could identify the unknowns later.

One never knew who might be lurking right there in front of the whole world, just waiting to be recognized. Stories didn't wait for permission to be written, she wrenched them out of the world's secret places.

Doctor Lecter radiated so much charismatic energy, he was bound to draw in some interesting characters... Hopefully the killers would be curious about him too. Rich people knew how to keep secrets but Freddie knew how to expose them. He should at the very least be an interesting interview.

In contrast Doctor Graham shuffled in 43 minutes late, downed three glasses of champagne in a row and hadn't moved an inch from where he'd slouched against the wall avoiding eye contact with everyone and anyone. He wore an ancient green flannel with a questionably intentional stain on the breast pocket. What was it? Chocolate? Barbecue sauce? River mud? She'd heard things about the intractable genius though she'd never had the opportunity to speak to him directly. From what's she'd heard, she didn't doubt he'd dressed exactly as poorly as he'd been able to get away with. Good for him. She respected people who kept their boundaries even when they annoyed her personally. It wasn't always easy to do when you were different.

Will Graham was definitely different.

Surrounded by the increasingly loud and overwhelming crowd, agitated to the point of nearly vibrating, Doctor Graham was keeping his distance from the press of people as much as possible while casting side long glances at the rest of the investigative team, especially the magnetic Doctor Lecter. She couldn't quite tell if he was angry or longing for inclusion... both maybe.

Just when she was thinking about taking a stroll around the gallery to see what she could ferret out, a handsome, extremely posh black man slid into Doctor Graham's personal space despite Will's don't talk to me demeanor. He was an ex she'd wager based on their mutually resentful expressions.

Ooh. People said all sorts of revealing things when they were irritated. Never mind taking a walk, now would be the perfect time to talk him. Maybe he'd let something juicy about the case slip. She couldn't waste an opportunity.

When she got within hearing range the two were caught up in the universal quiet strain of a 'polite' public fight, Freddie did her best to be slow and unobtrusive, pretending to be pinned behind an oblivious pack of champagne buzzed gala attendees so she could hear as much as possible. The mystery man was stage whispering in a controlled condescending hiss.

"Will this is ridiculous, why would you even be here for this, this circus? I'm more than capable of-"

Doctor Graham cut the man off, his face pinched in a barely restrained fury.

"No Tobias. How many times do I have to tell you no? Don't be such a creep. Aren't you supposed to be the classy one here? You don't want to push me in to giving you a hard no-"

An explosion of laughter nearby drowned out the quiet argument and drew Doctor Graham's attention her direction even as she did her best to not look like she was eaves dropping. A brief shadow of displeasure rolled over professor Graham's face, immediately replaced with a stiff artificial smile.

"Freddie Lounds, to what do I owe the displeasure?"

When she turned to answer him, equally fake smile slapped across her face, the mystery man was gone.

Huh, that was interesting maybe. If that uptight snob was his type, maybe that explained all the peering at Doctor Lecter?

"Doctor Graham, I'm just dying to know if you think this whole operation will work? I haven't gotten the impression that either The Toothfairy or The Chesapeake Ripper are stupid enough to walk into such an obvious trap"

Will cocked his head, jaw muscles working as he fought a bark of dry laughter.

"... Jack seems to think they are Miss Lounds. Who am I to argue with an expert?"

"Come on Will-, Doctor Graham. You're the expert who's paid by the experts. You're practically famous for all your strong contrary opinions about The Ripper. You must have some opinion"

Will, grimaced, his voice a wooden rasp of unenthusiastic annoyance.

"I've been informed that it's my job to stand here politely, keep my eyes open, and inform Jack personally if I have any revelations about the ripper's mental state. It's his job to catch the killers. So, officially I couldn't possibly."

"And unofficially?"

"Unofficially as in off the record? We both know there's no off the record with you Freddie.... Fuck it. Ok, fine. I think that,*if* the Ripper's here, if we even interpreted that right. If he's *here*, he's to smart to accidentally expose himself. He'll be hiding right under all our noses, probably laughing at us. The only person he'll show himself to is The Toothfairy. None of

these people have earned that.... dubious and dangerous honor. This wild goose chase is a monumental waste of my precious fucking time. So politely Freddie, fuck off and go harass someone else for your story"

Freddie laughed, not even angry. Will Graham really was almost famous for his strong opinions and bad attitude. She would've been disappointed if he was polite.

"Fair enough Professor. If I see your ex, I'll tell him you died unexpectedly"

Will Graham looked at her then, a mix of surprise and something more complicated... an all consuming, hauntingly perceptive, brilliant loneliness clenched bare and frothing between his teeth. For just a second she could see exactly why Special Agent Jack Crawford put up with him. Then the moment passed and his face crumpled into his trademark pinched grimace.

"Perfect. If I have to sit here any longer, you won't even be lying."

His eyes slid away from her, dismissing her wordlessly. Time for her to take a walk around and see what else she could find, maybe take a run at trying to get something out of Doctor Lecter... first she should probably check in with Beverly. This was sorta supposed to be a date after all.

Scanning the now packed gallery, she found Beverly near the main entrance with Bella Crawford, Alana & Margot Bloom-Verger, a nervous little round man she recognized as a frequent flyer serial killer groupie who posted on her website all the time. His user name was some sort of cheese pun. An insufferable but harmless little man, she wasn't surprised to find him here.

As she wove through the crowd, another woman joined the group, a pretty black woman in a silky moss green dress, and carrying the sort of long white cane that meant she was blind. She looked frightened. Had something happened?

Freddie tried to wind her way through the packed gallery faster. The crowd was increasingly interfering with her reporting.

Briefly she imagined firing a gun into the ceiling, sending all the civilians running away in fear so she and Bev could look for clues in peace. But pipe dreams and wishful thinking didn't write stories.

By the time Freddie was able to push her way through the increasingly intoxicated crowd of art snobs, both the cheese guy and the frightened blind woman were gone.

Dammit what did she miss? She'd have to *sexy* grill Bev about it later. When the rest of the group caught sight of Freddie, they all all smiled, waving her over. That felt... kind of nice.

Freddie spliced herself into the narrow space at Beverly's side. The group shifted easily to give the couple space. Warmth threatened to bloom in Freddie's chest.

Bella, official queen mother of this group, held out a perfectly manicured hand in invitation. Though there was an exhaustion in her bearing, her smile was genuine.

"Miss Lounds. Our Beverly has been telling us so much about you. I know my husband can be a bear when he's on a case. I won't excuse him. But here you are anyway. I'm so glad you came. Our girl deserves someone in her life who's not afraid of what she does. You're off to a lovely start, and my dear you're a vision tonight."

Freddie'd never experienced the approval of any sort of parental figure. For a split second she froze under the unexpected impact of the compliment, though she recovered quickly. If there was one thing Freddie Lounds was good at, it was thinking on her feet.

"... Thank you so much Mrs Crawford. You're right, the work doesn't scare me and your husband doesn't either. I guess they're things Bee and I have in common, jobs people don't understand and a need for the truth of things. Bev... She's special, deserves everything. If she thinks that's me, I won't argue. I didn't get here by stomping on my opportunities"

Bella lit up even more so then.

"Good, I'm so glad we understand each other Freddie. Give it a little time. I think you'll fit in just fine with our merry little band of odd ducks and obsessive truth seekers"

From anyone else that'd be a back handed compliment, from Bella Crawford it was completely sincere.

She could... fit in here? Huh, yeah that felt more than just a little good, both terrifying and wonderful. The promise of being understood and accepted. Some people would do anything to be seen, understood, loved for who they were.

She wasn't sure if she was one of those people just yet... but she was for the first time kinda eager to find out if she could be.

❤️

Bella resisted the urge to flinch and rub her sternum. A fevered rattling ache was settling in her lungs in a way she knew meant she'd over done it. It was nice getting to spend time with Jack's team, people who'd become her friends over the years. It was fun to get dressed up and feel beautiful again, if only for a couple hours. Even if she'd end up paying for it with wrenching pain and a deep wracking cough later.

These days she was painfully aware, every opportunity to do anything might be her last time. This might be the last time she got dressed up and held court as the officer's wife. When she was young she would've told anyone she would never miss something so boring. Now, in the cool autumn evening of her life, she thought she might. There was nothing so clarifying as death gnawing on your bones, slurping all the life out of your organs... to make you realize how much time you wasted merely being alive and not actually living.

Now with the life being torn out of her in great terrifying gouts by a villain her husband could never slap in handcuffs, Bella Crawford found every moment she spent living, just her and Jack and their gaggle of investigative children... delicious... as delicious as one of Dr Lecter's famously resplendent meals.

Still, she should listen to her body when it told her she needed to rest or there would be hell to pay later. She found Jack hovering in an almost tangible frustration near The Primavera. When he saw her he smiled warm and sincere. The smile slid to concern when he saw the pained fatigue she could hide from everyone but him.

He held her trembling hands between his palms with such gentle strength. Those cool, calloused, capable hands had ended dangerous men's lives. The same hands that held her so carefully. Perhaps she should turn away from that knowledge but it made her feel precious and protected, not threatened, not anymore.

When she was young she resented it sometimes, his protective nature, like needing care somehow made her less capable, weak. What a funny thing it was, learning how to let someone love you on the heels of a death sentence. She should thank cancer for that at least she supposed, thank it for allowing her to really see how much her husband loved her, even when they were speaking completely different emotional languages.

Serial murderers momentarily forgotten, Jack held her chilly hands between his, eyes roaming her face like he could divine the nature of her suffering with his eyes alone.

Divine it and arrest it.

His brow drawing down in a tight growl of concern, Jack rubbed warm soothing circles into the back of her aching wrists.

"Bella, my wife, are you ok?"

"It's fine Jack, I get tired easily now. That's all. I might have one of your junior officers take me home in a bit. You look as tired as I feel husband. No luck yet?"

Jack sighed but didn't stop rubbing comfort into her chilly hands and aching forearms.

"No unfortunately, and my star profilers are having some sort of academic pissing match. They won't even speak to each other. Bella these grown men are going to kill me with their childish antics. I guess it's not all bad, at least we'd be buried together."

"Hey none of that talk. I'm not taking you with me. You are required by marital law to keep going, to live another day... If only to spend that day being annoyed by forensics professors. I'll rest easiest knowing you're still doing what you were put on this earth to do my love."

Kissing the back of her hands like he used to do when they were young and new, Jack looked over the bony curve of her knuckles so he could meet her eyes directly.

"You know I love you with all of me, right?"

The warmth of his breath, the firm softness of his mouth pressed a physical comfort into her aching bones that always made her feel better, if only for a moment.

"I very much do"

He held her eyes, the determined set of his jaw physically manifesting his desire to tear the cancer out of her body like a predator gnawing off an infected limb. If only it was that easy.

Scuffling and then a wave of alarmed whispering from the other end of the gallery caught their attention at the same time. The crowd jostled with a subdued fearful urgency. Museum staff and the crowds whispering reached them at the same time.

~~*Someone was sick in the bathroom.~~

~~Not sick~~

~~a seizure~~

~~a stroke~~

~~Death~~

~~Not sick, dead~~

~~Someone died in there~~

~~Dead~~

~~Murdered~~

~~A body~~

~~A body~~

~~a body a body a body~~

~~bodybodybody*~~

Bella couldn't hear the museum security head as he whispered urgently in Jack's ear but she could hear the crowd.

Agent Crawford was instantly back on the hunt, sharp with decisive intent. Worry for her pinched his broad handsome face as he looked back to her.

"Bella? I-"

She waved him on, freeing him from his concern for now.

"It's fine Jack. I'm fine. Go get your killers. Just be careful husband. I'll be angry if you die before me."

"Id never leave you to face this alone"

"I know, now go before one of your people starts feeling heroic and gets themselves killed or pukes on the body"

Amusement crinkled his eyes for a second before he kissed her a gentle goodbye and turned to push the crowd back, already giving orders and asking important questions. He was a man beautifully in his element. She did her best to remember him like this, the strength in his shoulders and the confidence in his spine that even a suit jacket couldn't hide.

This might be the last time she saw that too.

A hot itchy cough dug at her lungs, threatening to tear her to shreds if she didn't lay down. It really was past time for her to head home. Now Jack wouldn't be home until well into tomorrow anyway. Her wifely duty was done for the day. She trusted her husband to do his job just as excellently as he always had. Satisfied, Bella waved down one of the milling trainees she knew by sight, one that Jack wouldn't need until after the profilers had done their part.

"Agent, Jack entrusted me to you. If you could take me home I'd be ever so thankful"

The agent to their credit, only looked with professional longing to the place where all the FBI agents and security guards were congregating, they didn't argue or complain. No matter how much they wished to be in the action right now, everyone in the whole department knew how much Jack Crawford loved his wife.

"Of course Mrs Crawford"

It wasn't until she was safely settled in the black FBI issue suv that Bella closed her eyes and finally let the haze carry her away. Safe and trusting they'd wake her once they got her home.

❤️

The Walters Art Museum
The Divine Form of Botticelli, a reflection on the artist, his life, his art, & his mastery of the depiction of human nature in all its divine savagery
March 3rd - June 25th
THIS IS NOT
A CRIME SCENE

Jack grit his teeth and sent FBI agents on a half dozen necessary errands as the head of museum security lead him to the bathroom where a man's body was just found.

Right under their noses

Weeks worth of frustration solidified, turning to a scathing anger, adrenaline tore hot and jagged through his body. He'd had enough of whatever game it was these two psychopaths were playing.

In the entry way of the well appointed overly decadent bathroom, a disheveled middle aged man was at first glance resting peacefully in one of the courtesy chairs. He held an old fashioned pipe in one hand, and a book of what turned out to be poetry in the other. It was the kind of leather bound book and tobacco pipe men of a certain social strata always had when he was a kid.

Above the man's head, scrawled neatly in what was almost certainly blood, was one sentence.

"This is not a crime scene"

What the hell was that supposed to mean?

In the back of his mind he went over which of his officers were following him over. Where was Will? Hannibal? Without looking away from the uncomfortably peaceful tableau, Jack growled for one of his agents.

"Where are my profilers?"

Jimmy looked apologetic in the peripheral of Jack's vision.

"Well, uh Doctor Bloom and Doctor Chilton are right outside the door waiting for your orders..."

Jack huffed, looking sideways at Jimmy, radiating don't try me right now.

"You know who I meant Jimmy"

Jimmy bobbled his head in resigned acknowledgment.

"Uh well, Uhm Will is... Uh I think, having a panic attack? The crowd, He uh-, and Doctor Lecter was in the middle of explaining some marinade technique to a half dozen women so rich they could buy me if they felt so inclined. He said he'd be a long *presently*"

Rubbing his jaw, Jack looked to the ceiling and the heavens beyond it in a silent plea for patience.

"Either The Toothfairy or The Chesapeake Ripper have left us another cryptic message. I need it translated yesterday. These killers want to send cute little messages carved into actual people? I have a message of my own. No more. If they want a war, a war is what they'll get. That means my biggest guns don't get to sit on the sidelines anymore. Bring me Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham. It's gonna be a long night and we all have work to do."

❤️

**The electric arc of these two nerves that don't touch... -*near the heart*-*

We note the black shivers under a lens...

Is this feeling...?

This white water rapid flowing methodical love splits my body into rags

Toothpaste pastry

Transatlantic Tickets

The crowds crash the column

Couched in wind

Range of rockets on my head

The bloody revenge of the liberated dance

*- Tristan Tzara, Assessment (translated from French)**

THE CROWDS CRASH THE COLU
COUCHED
RANGE OF ROCKETS
(ON MY HEAD)
THE BLOODY REVENGE OF THE
TAP DANC
Ceci n'est pas une pipe.
Walters Art Museum
THIS IS NOT
A CRIME SCENE

End Notes

My Fic & Fanart Accts
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Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!